


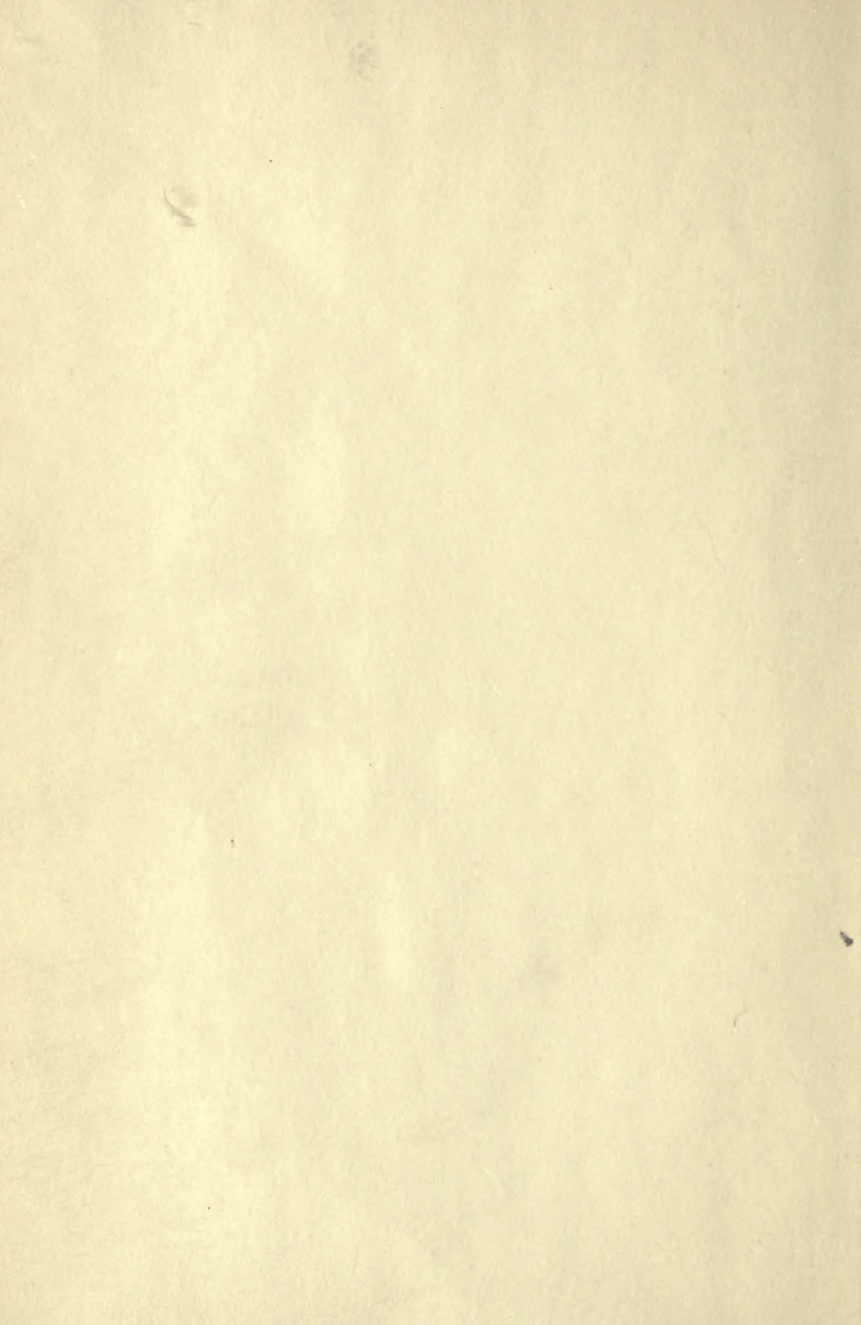


Presented to the
LIBRARY *of the*
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by

NEW PLAY SOCIETY



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



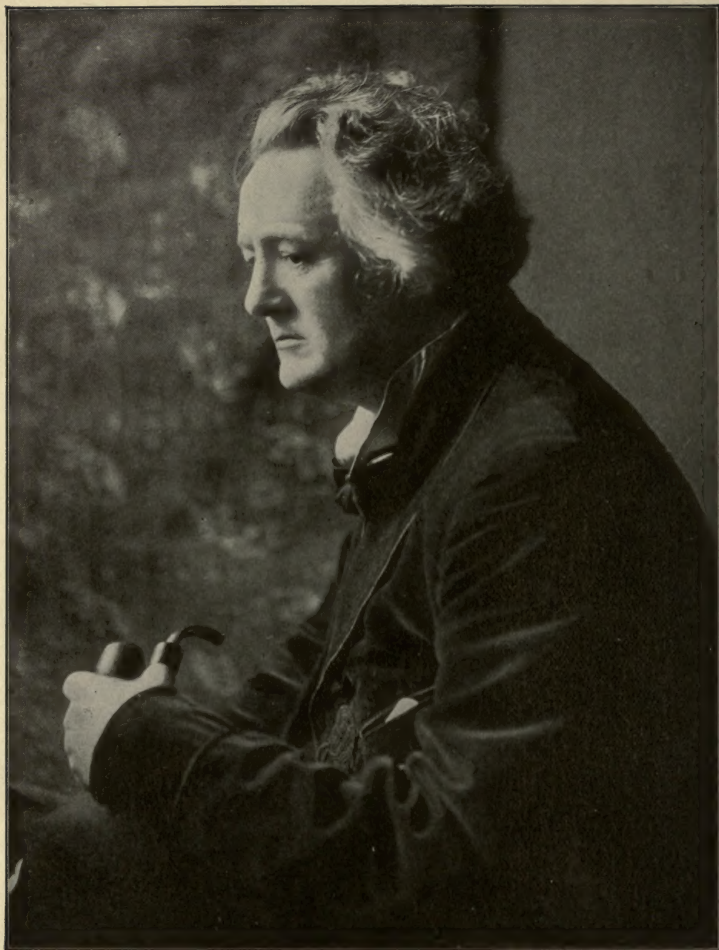
(52)

209

BOOKS BY
CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

THE IDOL-BREAKER. Portrait.....	<i>net</i>	\$1.25
THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE. Ill'd.....		1.25
THE WINTERFEAST. Ill'd.....		1.25
THE TERRIBLE MEEK. Frontispiece.....	<i>net</i>	1.00
THE NECESSARY EVIL.....	<i>net</i>	1.00

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALICE BOUGHTON

"I put it together, out of my own life."
Charles Hall Kennedy

THE IDOL-BREAKER

A PLAY OF THE PRESENT DAY IN FIVE ACTS
SCENE INDIVIDABLE, SETTING FORTH THE STORY
OF A MORNING IN THE RIPENING SUMMER

BY
CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

AUTHOR OF
"THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE"

*Behold, I have created the smith that
bloweth the fire of coals, and bringeth
forth a weapon for his work; and I
have created the waster to destroy*
—Isaiah liv 16



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMXIV

ALL STAGE, RECITATION, PUBLICATION, TRANSLATION
AND OTHER RIGHTS RESERVED. APPLICATION
SHOULD BE MADE TO MESSRS. HARPER & BROTHERS



PS
3521
E53I4
1914

COPYRIGHT, 1914, BY CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLISHED JANUARY, 1914

M-N

TO
THE PEOPLE OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN WHOSE GREAT COMPANY I GAINED MY FREEDOM

NAOMI. *Ay, you'm drunk or mad or got a devil, if you dare to shew them what's inside you. All the same, sometimes, when the blood roars in the heart . . .*

ADAM. *That's it! Then you get up and begin to tell them things!*

THE AUTHOR

THE IDOL-BREAKER

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

ADAM	A blacksmith
NAOMI	A woman of the highroad
ELLEN	A woman of Little Boswell
NATHANIEL DANK	A lawyer
SAMUEL SNARK	A man of letters
JEREMIAH JONES	An ironmonger
JAKE	A wastrel

THE PLACE

INTERIOR OF THE SMITHY OF LITTLE BOSWELL

THE TIME

BETWEEN THE HOURS OF FOUR AND HALF PAST SIX
ON A MORNING IN RIPENING SUMMER. TODAY

THE SCENE

The Tired Business Man is politely requested for the purpose of this description, to consider himself a Little Boswellite. He is seated comfortably in the market-square he loves so well, contemplating reality at last through a large open Imaginary Window; and waiting to be amused. Around him is a jumble of houses, hucksteries, brothels, a well-built prison, pigsties, libraries, beer-shops, and a place of worship. It is where he lives: his pride: to apply the touching panegyric of the poet, it is his own, his native Little Boswell. Behind him, dotted with disused lead mines and other marks of ancient toil, rises a lofty hill: the crest of which, formerly a Roman Camp—long since gone to dust—now flutters a beautiful new flag. From time to time, the Clock overhead, belonging to the big Sunday School, vouchsafes—untruthfully—the hour. Above that, dawns God's day.

The strain upon his imagination now relaxed, the Weary One will next please look in front of him, digest his victuals, and be amused.

IT IS THE INTERIOR OF THE SMITHY OF LITTLE BOSWELL. A place prodigious with many labours: the womb of things about to be born. The Building is of rough-hewn stones and huge oak timbers.

The BACK WALL presents three interests. Glancing from left to right, these are: the Long Window, the Big Door, and the Forge. The Long Window is low, silled and mullioned. The Big Door is Dutch, deeply embrasured, and before daybreak the Porch beyond it caverns it with shadows. The Forge, gaunt, grimy, cowed, has a base of boulders clamped with iron: its chimney clambering crookedly through augmenting glooms into the roof. The Handle of the Bellows in the corner juts out like a jib-boom.

Through the openings may be seen the Highroad, bounded over the way by a low Cobble Wall: above that, a rise of Green Field; and beyond, a wild of Purple Moors stretching away into the skies.

In the further end of the LEFT WALL is another door, heavily chained and padlocked. Its approach

is cluttered with green and rusty dumps of smelted metal. This is the Door of the Inner Workshop.

In the nearer end of the RIGHT WALL is another window, smaller than the first, though of good size. It is open, hollyhocks and geraniums jostling through it from outside. Let this be called the Open Window, to distinguish it from the Long Window at the back, and the Imaginary Window in front.

The Anvil occupies the middle of the floor. The fierce blue steel gleams in the dawn like anger. Upright beside it, stands the Sledge Hammer—a warrior, waiting.

There are no conveniences for sitting down; but left of the anvil is a Yellow Box, overturned, labelled *Empire Mustard*. Further on, a Wheelbarrow, laden at one end with Bricks. A Carpenter's Horse by the open window might serve a straddle. Above the mustard-box, a Nail-keg with protruding spikes invites the unwary; and a Ploughshare offers hospitably from the débris below the long low window.

A Butcher's Knife lies on the Grindstone by the bellows. A Leathern Apron hangs by the big door.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Beneath the open window is a Work-bench, covered with Tools and Diagrams. Nearby, a Scarlet Poster proclaims some socialist meeting. Karl Marx in lithograph decorates the inner workshop door.

The Floor, rugged with lavas, is a record of eruptive throes. Ochres, indigo, emerald, here and there bright splashes of crimson. Along the walls, on the shelves, high up in the rafters, demonic shapes and twistings in steel, in lead, in iron. Things formed and half formed: things in their first imagining: things scrapped and cast aside. Inextricable minglings. Nor metal only. There are bricks, cement, a drain-pipe, implements for digging, quarrying. Tools for carpentry. Paint-pots, flower-pots. Cart-wheels and the yoking gear of cattle. Books, even. Books! And a gigantic Hammer swung by chains above the yawning doorway.

Clearly, the litter of some portentous labour: the womb of some impregnate monster, now ripe and big with child.

THE LIGHTING

The First Act commences in utter darkness, passing through grey to white dawn. The Second Act

THE IDOL-BREAKER

is a white dawn, ending in sunrise. The Third Act is clear but clouded day. The Fourth Act, a thunder-flame of blood and burning bronze. The Fifth Act, golden sunlight.

The events taking place between four in the morning and six-thirty, half an hour is supposed to elapse during each act; as the clock indicates.

The Sunlight comes by way of the Open Window: as also, the Imaginary Window of our Jaded Brother.

THE COSTUMES

NAOMI glows one hue from head to foot; and wears ear-rings like a gipsy. ADAM, in russet-browns and tans: gaitered, aproned. JAKE is like a lizard, in dusty green, corduroyed, gaitered, with a mole-skin cap and waistcoat, and a red rag for neckerchief. He wears ear-rings.

The others dress in modes appropriate to their rank in Little Boswell. ELLEN is in gingham, covering her head with a shawl. NATHANIEL DANK goes gingerly in pepper and salt. SAMUEL SNARK sports

THE IDOL-BREAKER

check. JEREMIAH JONES, being an imitative soul, affects the ministerial; but will probably don a leathern apron hereafter.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CLOCK

The Bells representing this clock are built in the ceiling of the auditorium, and are worked from below by electricity. There are three notes only, two for the quarters and one for the hour, all dismally out of tune.



The Music informing this play is Beethoven, pianoforte sonata, Opus III.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

THE FIRST ACT

The Curtain rises upon darkness as the big Sunday School clock overhead drones four. This is followed by a long silence. Out of it then comes the shrill high cry of a cock crowing. It sounds like a triumphant jeer. A glimmering dawn creeps in, quickening imperceptibly. The smithy appears as in a vapour.

A man passes the long window. For a moment, his great bulk blots out the dawn. There is heard a fumbling at the door, and the man comes lumbering in. Hatless, coatless. It is ADAM.

Plucking the leathern apron from its peg, he drags it on. Rolls up his sleeves. Shuts to and bolts the lower half of the door. Then tries the bellows of the forge: the banked embers give back a sullen glow. He

THE IDOL-BREAKER

moves to the anvil and paws gloomily the sledge hammer. Lifts it, deep in thought. Then brings it clanging down upon the anvil. It is like a shout in iron.

ADAM. God! I'd like to break something.

A woman stands in the deep shadows of the big doorway, watching him. Her face is dimly visible. It is
NAOMI.

ADAM kicks the sledge aside, sits on the anvil and lights his pipe.

It's the place, that's what it is. Places like this breed slaves. That's why we blather so much about our freedom.

NAOMI. Talking to yourself? I thought it was on'y play-folk as did a thing like that.

He turns, startled at the voice.

What's the matter with you, master?
Got some maggots in your head?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Where the plague did you drop from?

NAOMI. Me? Oh, from out of the clouds.

ADAM. I think you did. I never set eyes on you before.

NAOMI. Didn't you? I set eyes on you though.

ADAM. I don't remember. When?

NAOMI. Last night. Up on the moor yonder.
We were kind of bedfellows, you and me,
last night: on'y you didn't know it.

He takes this in before speaking;

ADAM. Last night! Why, last night, I was . . .

NAOMI. Yes, I seen you. I was on the other side of the hedge.

ADAM. What were you doing, out after midnight?

NAOMI. Watching you.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. I heard something, too. I took it for some wild thing stirring in the dark.

NAOMI. It was me, watching.

ADAM (*uneasily*). How do you mean—watching?

NAOMI. Don't you know as all wild things watch men? They been at it a long time—since the beginning of the world. I tell you, they get to learn a lot about men, afore they done.

ADAM. Other side of the hedge, eh? Why didn't you speak?

NAOMI. I did. All night long.

ADAM. I never heard a word.

NAOMI. There wasn't a word.

Her eyes shine out from the shadows.

ADAM. If you want to know anything, I wasn't properly myself, last night. I was drunk, that's what I was. Yes, I was: dead drunk!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. Well, I known that kind too, in my life.

ADAM. It's the only way to be free.

NAOMI. Ay, a many of them said so, one time and another, the way I come.

ADAM. What way might that be?

NAOMI. I come a goodish way to get here. I don't know as I could find it again myself! . . . Not even if I wanted. It would take a bloodhound to follow me, the way I come.

ADAM. Humph! Expecting one?

NAOMI. Not this journey.

He is drawn a little nearer to her.

ADAM. You're a gipsy woman.

NAOMI. Am I?

ADAM. Yes, I've seen your sort before. There's

THE IDOL-BREAKER

lots on 'em tramp up and down this way on the highroad.

NAOMI. My sort, were they? What's—your sort? . . . Or are bastards a kind of no sort, like me?

He is taken aback for a moment.

ADAM. Well, and if I am one! You had nothing to do with my birth.

NAOMI. You don't know that. The stars have something to say about that, maybe.

ADAM. One of them fortune tellers, eh? . . .

Funny, you should mention stars, too. I was thinking of stars all night long. Them and the morning dew between them sobered me up.

Here! How did you tell I were a bastard?

NAOMI. I seen it, like it were wrote.

ADAM. Where did you learn to see a thing like that?

NAOMI. On the other side of the hedge,

THE IDOL-BREAKER

He is drawn nearer still.

ADAM. There's one thing plain to me. Your sort never come out of Little Boswell.

NAOMI. Maybe I missed something. What is it?

ADAM. Look around you, far as you can see. That's Little Boswell! All them dummy-heads sleeping out there—man, woman and child. They're Little Boswell! My God, you'd know it right enough, if you belonged.

NAOMI. But you don't belong. Bastards don't belong. Don't that seem to lift you up a bit?

ADAM. Ay sometimes, inside of me, here. But Lord bless you, they don't understand pride.

Come inside, woman. I'll tell you something.

He makes to undo the bolt. She is watching him steadily.

NAOMI. Do you want me?

[21]

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Why yes, didn't you hear me ask you to . . .

And their eyes meet.

Yes, I want you.

*The door is open. She moves softly
to the anvil and sits. Her garments
flush through the grey dawn like
flame.*

ADAM *seats himself on the mustard-box.*

NAOMI. Now, master. What's *your* misery?

ADAM. I'll tell you. Look through yon window.

He means the imaginary one in front.

See them little brown heaps, up and down the hillside? Them's lead mines. Been worked ever since the Romans were here. It was Romans first set Little Boswell going; and they begun by riddling yon hill with mines.

Maybe, you think lead mines mean noth-

ing but holes in the earth with lumps of lead at the bottom of them. They mean more than that. Something alive. Crawling on the belly in the dark, like blind-worms. When the Romans were here, they meant—Slaves! Hundreds of years ago, that was; but the blood of them slaves has been running down into these valleys ever since. Some of it's bubbling up inside me now.

Slave's blood!—That's my misery. We can't get clean of it. Oh, you wouldn't think it, not to hear us talk. You'd think we were God's own people in the Promised Land. See that thing flapping up yonder on the hilltop? That's our flag. Want to know what that stands for?—Freedom!

*It is not visible; but it is a little like
every flag on earth.*

NAOMI. Ay, it looks fine, blowing there on the wind.

ADAM. Ay—on the wind!

That's where I'm different to them.
Dead words don't mean nothing to me.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

It's the bastard in me, I suppose. That and the work I got to do.

NAOMI. Ay, what work is that, master?

ADAM. I'm like God. I make things.

She searches him calmly like a child.

NAOMI. I felt there was something about you, moment I set eyes on you.

ADAM. Don't you see, woman? I'm a blacksmith.

NAOMI. Ay, you talk like a blacksmith.

ADAM. I talk the sort I am. There's more sorts of blacksmith in the world, than them as tinkers with bits of iron. There's the sort as blows fire out of their own souls. I'm one of them. Before ironmongers were, I was: I make living children. Why woman, I tell you—you won't believe me; but I've made ploughs in my time!

There is a light in his eye.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. What, them great hungry dragons as gnaw deep into the flesh of the earth?

There is a light in hers.

ADAM. Yes, the worms and the moles as burrow under the sod, they know something about me. Listen! I'll tell you something as'll open your eyes! . . .

An apocalyptic ecstasy uplifts him;

I make tools! Tools for the lead mines, tools for the quarries yonder, drilling tools, tools for boring. They can't dig their gardens without me. They come to me for their water pipes. I've built windmills! Why, I'm all over the place, and they pass by and don't notice it.

NAOMI. Go on, master. I like to watch iron forging.

ADAM. It's inspiration, that's what it is. Like thoughts coming alive. Only they don't believe in inspiration nowadays.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. Ay, you'm drunk or mad or got a devil, if you dare to shew them what's inside you. All the same, sometimes, when the blood roars in the heart . . .

ADAM. That's it! Then you get up and begin to tell them things. Like I done them dummyheads, six year ago. Like I done many times. Like I done—only last night.

She glances across, interrogatively.

Ay, down in the big Sunday School, that was. Before you and me . . .

His hand passes vaguely over his brow.

. . . Up on the moor yonder.

NAOMI. Sunday School, eh?

ADAM. It's the only place of any size, they've got. Properly speaking, that's what Little Boswell is. Just a big Sunday School of candy-puking kids.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. I shouldn't a-took you for Sunday School, exactly. Not last night.

ADAM. Me! . . . They'd soon let you know what I am! After last night! I'm the blasphemous swine as don't believe in nothing! That's why God sometimes puts it inside me, to get up and tell them as do, as they don't.

Maybe, though, you didn't hear nothing of our little love-feast, down yonder?

NAOMI. I did hear something. Kind of a bellowing, wasn't it?

ADAM. That was me, making myself popular.

You never saw such a picnic. Flags and high-cockalorums all over the Sunday School. Oh, it was religious, right enough. Plenty of scripture mottoes! And drums and hymns and prayers and ginger-pop, all going off together.

NAOMI. Why, what was doing, down there?

ADAM. Grand High Jubilee of the Constituted Sons of Freedom!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

It's the biggest bean-feast Little Boswell ever dreamed of. God Almighty might come down from heaven and start the Day of Judgment, and they wouldn't notice it, alongside their jubilee. They've been hulloalooing over it since the Tower of Babel. So I thought it was about time I come, and put a simple question to them: just one question. I asked: Where did bastards come in? Took me exactly forty-five minutes by their groggy old clock.

NAOMI. How did they answer you?

ADAM. Like Sons of Freedom. They chucked me out.

NAOMI. How did you get even with them, after that?

ADAM. Hollared a few bad words through the vestry window; and went and liquored myself up to the neck. To spite them.

That's how you come to find me on the moor.

The memory of it holds them a moment.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. It was a hard bed up yonder in the bracken.

ADAM. I got no sleep out of it. I lay thinking.
Something sort of—come to me, last night.

NAOMI. It was a clear night. There wasn't a cloud
in the sky.

ADAM (*rapt*). Like so many eyes looking into me,
that's what they were! . . .

There's one thing I can't make out.
What brought you up yonder?—watching,
as you call it.

NAOMI. The stars. And you wanted me.

*The Sunday School clock drones the
quarter, as he turns towards her.*

ADAM. I—wanted—you? Why, until this morn-
ing, I never so much as dreamed such a
woman as you . . .

NAOMI. There's a lot of dreaming goes on inside the
heart, as you never know on, till the hour
strikes.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. But I don't know anything about you. Don't even know your name, where you come from, what you are . . . What are you?

NAOMI. Do you want to know? I am a queen.
You wouldn't think it, not to look at me, would you?

*He looks at her long and earnestly.
Then suddenly, drawing closer;*

ADAM. Yes, I would! . . .

But he draws back before her eyes.

I always heard as they had kings and such-like over them.

NAOMI. Who?

ADAM. The gipsy folk.

She smiles inscrutably.

How did you come by it?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. By blood, from my folk. We been a great people in our day: Egyptian, Chinee, Phœnician.

ADAM. Phœnician! That's rum, too. My mother's kin come from Phœnicians. That was the name of them dead men out yonder. Them lead miners.

NAOMI. Maybe. We went one way and another, all over the world.

ADAM. Slaves, they were. Guttled out yon hill for the Romans.

NAOMI. Ours were kings. Builded cities—for their own treasure.

ADAM. Cities! I never heard as your sort hailed from cities.

NAOMI. We don't no longer. We belong nowhere. We just wander about from place to place like blown dust.

All the same, we had one of our own, once.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. What kind might that be?

NAOMI. The kind men builded, when they first begun to dream them. To store wealth in. That was long ago.

It had walls of marble, our city, and seven big gates of gold. Shining! Up on a hill, it was. So it might be seen. It wasn't ashamed of itself. There was nothing to hide in our city.

The men-folk, they were kings, and knew it: they made things with their own hands. The women, they were queens: they brought forth living children. And there was bread enough for all to eat. They say, gods come by way of our blood: gods with flesh to them, as walked on the earth, like men.

Then bad luck begun inside us, and we died. That's why we wandered. We been wandering ever since.

ADAM. How did you come to die?

NAOMI. We made a mistake—a mistake about a word.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. What was it?

NAOMI. Freedom.

ADAM. What do you mean by freedom?

NAOMI. Don't ask me. My meaning changes with the stars.

ADAM. What do you mean *now*? *Today*?

NAOMI. What *you* mean.

ADAM. What do I mean?

NAOMI. Something wild like me.

ADAM. You! Are you—free?

NAOMI. Like the wind.

ADAM. Why, woman, you are what I've been looking for, all my life.

*They have both risen. They stand
facing each other.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. Well, I'm here. What are you going to do with me?

ADAM. What are you going to do with *me*?

NAOMI. I don't know. That's one of the things I can't see. Perhaps destroy you.

ADAM. Woman!

NAOMI. Don't you come near me. There's danger in me, if you don't take me the right way. Queens can't be played with, same as common folk. Not my sort.

ADAM. Well, I'm ready. I'm not afraid.

NAOMI. You don't understand. This isn't talking.

ADAM. There's one thing I understand. It begun the moment you set foot inside this forge. Ay, and before that!—Last night, out yonder, under the stars. We belong, you and me! I see it plain, like dawn coming up out of the night: we belong!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. Take care! You'm not the first man I heard say a word like that.

ADAM. Well, I'm the last; and I'll stand by it.

NAOMI. Keep off! . . .

ADAM. Why, what would happen? . . .

He stands hesitating before her.

NAOMI. There's something at the back of me you know nothing about. Oh, it's dead, it's done for, sure enough; and yet . . .

There's nothing living as can follow you so close as that!

ADAM. Name it for me. And I'll grapple with it.

NAOMI. I can't quite spell it out. There's fangs to it. And a baying along the twisted ways of the moors! . . .

He shakes himself free of her eyes.

ADAM. What's dead and done for don't move me.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

No, nor anything to come, neither. It's now! That's all I care about.

NAOMI. Ay, that's what they all said.

ADAM. There's none of Little Boswell about you. No slave's blood! You are not all tied up and strangled like a trapped wolf.

NAOMI. That's true. No ties, no bonds, the way I go!

ADAM. Out on the highroad yonder, that's your way. Up hill, down dale, any path you will! . . .

NAOMI. Homeless! . . .

ADAM. Masterless! . . .

NAOMI. Naked! . . .

ADAM. Free! . . .

NAOMI. Alone! . . .

ADAM. Like a wild thing! Like a young bird!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Why, woman, I've been waiting for this moment. Waiting for you. Now I know the way I got to go.

NAOMI. What way?

ADAM. Yonder. On the highroad. With you.

*She gazes deep into his soul before
replying;*

NAOMI. Well, you'm on that journey already. But there's something you forgotten.

ADAM. Forgotten . . . What?

NAOMI. The price.

ADAM. Price what for?

NAOMI. For me.

My sort set big store by themselves.
Queens don't give themselves for nothing.
Not to slaves.

ADAM. What . . . What are you asking of me?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. My sort don't ask. I watch; and when the hour strikes . . . God help the thing as bars my way, when I come to claim what's owing me! That is, if you don't take me right.

What, back to Little Boswell again, so soon?

ADAM (*fiercely*). Tell me what it is you want! I'll pay it, yes I will, whatever it is. My God, for you, woman, I'd give up everything I got.

NAOMI. That's what it will cost.

ADAM. Everything! Did you say everything? . . . Why then, I'll shew you what I'm flinging away for you! . . .

He makes a movement towards the inner workshop; but turns half way;

When I spoke to you just now about them tools I made, and all them ploughs and other wonders, I didn't tell you everything: I kept something back. Oh, I'm a slave,

THE IDOL-BREAKER

that's true; but I'm a bastard—God's bastard, as holds Little Boswell together: the slave as makes things, do you understand? Well, perhaps I can break them, too! Without me, they shiver into pieces! . . .

Now mark what I'm saying . . .

His voice sinks to an awed whisper;

I've made something alive. It can speak. It's the most terrible thing on earth: it tells the truth. Comes from God: *I* made it.

He beckons her across mysteriously;

It's in there. Listen. D'you hear anything?

She lays her head to the workshop door, lifting her hand for silence.

NAOMI. Something muffled. Very soft. Like a little heart beating.

ADAM. I put it together, out of my own life.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

He turns a scared look upon her;

Tell me, woman, have you ever borne a child?

Her eyes widen with unspoken thought.

NAOMI. I know what you mean.

ADAM (*passionately*). Every pang, every agony, I have known it! There isn't the woman living as can learn me anything about it. My child, do you understand? None of your Little Boswell well-begots; but mine! The bastard's! My child!

NAOMI. I see! I understand!

ADAM. The blood of my heart, it was, as woke it from dead iron. It's not born yet. Never cried! No tongue, no voice! Well now, if I leave all this behind me . . .

NAOMI. Turn back! There's death that way!

ADAM. It's your price! Take it! It's everything I got!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. They perished, everyone of them, that road!
Turn back again!

ADAM. I'm on the way already. It's too late.
The stars have spoken.

NAOMI. Not so, by all the flames and burning blood-
moons of the skies!

ADAM. Bedfellows!—You yourself first spoke it!
That means as we belong. You, the
gipsy woman from God knows what wild
places of the world, and me, the Little
Boswell bastard! . . . You've had your
payment. Now, what have you got for
me?

*She snatches up the butcher's knife
as he rushes madly towards her;*

NAOMI. Stand back, or I'll knife you! . . .

The man as mates with me hereafter
must bring me living children. I'll have
no more dead things born of my flesh.

ADAM. What, afraid? You—a wild thing!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. Ay: it's the wildness makes afraid. Hark!

She is standing by the open window.

ADAM. What now? What are you listening for?

NAOMI. Something down the way I come. I thought . . . Like the noise of a hound snuffing! . . .

She draws back, sinking upon the handle of the bellows. The quickening coals illumine her, and die again.

A woman appears in the big doorway. She has a shawl over her head. It is ELLEN.

ELLEN. Thank God! I've been that worried about you! Where ha' you been all night?

She comes to him with a harassed look. He takes her to him, as in a daze.

ADAM. I had forgotten you. You're Little Boswell, too! . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Didn't they tell you nothing, down there?
About me, last night?

ELLEN. I never seen a soul since you banged out of
the house.

ADAM. Didn't you go to the jubilee?

ELLEN. I hadn't the heart, and you spoiling a good
supper with your queer ways. Just be-
cause a few bells begun ringing!

He growls ominously.

(whimpering.) I didn't see nothing. Not
so much as a bun. Where you been?

ADAM. Sprawling drunk. Top of yon moor. Under
the stars.

ELLEN. Yes, God knows what might come to you,
in them blear mists, alone!

NAOMI *(rising)*. Alone! . . .

ELLEN *turns and sees her by the forge.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. Who is the woman? What is she doing here?

NAOMI. What are you doing here? Who are you, woman?

ELLEN (*bridling*). Me? I am his wife.

They stand looking at each other in the white dawn: NAOMI, a kindling beacon, and ELLEN in gingham.

The Sunday School clock drones the half-hour.

If required, the CURTAIN may descend at this point.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The sun has not yet risen over the hills. ELLEN stands by the anvil: ADAM by the wheelbarrow; and NAOMI by the carpenter's horse. They are silent for a moment, the women face to face.

NAOMI. If I was to tell you who I am, you wouldn't be any wiser. I'm not Little Boswell. I'm something you never had no dealings with in your life.

ELLEN. I've known gipsy women before now. They're common enough. I've watched their carryings on many a time from my parlour window.

NAOMI. You'll be watching a long while from that window, afore you know me.

ELLEN. I'm not so sure as I want to know you.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. All the same, I'm here. In the same world with you. You can't blot me out by shutting your eyes.

ELLEN. I don't know what you mean.

NAOMI. That's what you got to watch for: what I mean.

ELLEN. I didn't come here to mag with you. I come to look for my man.

NAOMI. Maybe you'll find him. He's not far off yet.

ELLEN. Well, you may get some on 'em to take your meaning: *I* can't follow a single word you say.

NAOMI. Ay: you'm Little Boswell.

She moves into the big doorway, a glowing shadow, looking up the moors.

ELLEN. Why, of course! I was born here! . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

She joins her man by the wheelbarrow.

Adam, what do you think we ought to do about her? She's not quite all there, if you ask me.

ADAM. Well, in a way, she isn't. She's not just an ordinary woman.

ELLEN. Well, I am; and I don't like the looks of her! Look at her now! It's no use her waiting yonder: she won't get nothing out of us. I hope *you've* not been making a fool of yourself again, giving her anything! . . . Adam, what have you been giving her?

ADAM. What's the use! I might as well explain to a patch of turnip. You never do understand me.

ELLEN. I think I ought to! Why, we live together, you and me.

ADAM. Well, if it's only a matter of houses . . .

ELLEN. It's houses we have to live in! We're not

THE IDOL-BREAKER

like some, thank God, as gad about from place to place without no house.

ADAM. Humph! I said you wouldn't understand.

ELLEN. I'd understand, if you'd only talk plain. It's all this hinting and head-nodding gives me the wobbles. Your wry-necked way of saying things.

ADAM. It's your wry-necked way of listening to them. If I was to tell you plain, you'd only take it for lying, or something funny enough for newspapers. Look here, Ellen—You're a Bible woman: supposing I was to tell you in your own lingo? Supposing I was to tell you as I've been converted? Knocked flat as a pancake, like Balaam, like Paul! What would you say?

ELLEN. I'd say you were a godless liar. Like Ananias.

ADAM. But it's true: I am! I've seen the light! Glory alleloolia: praise the Lord!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. Adam, think of your soul. You'll be struck or something. The light don't come to drunkards in their mocking.

ADAM. It come to me here in this forge, I tell you. Through yon doorway. Like a pillar of fire.

He follows her swift backward glance;

Ay, *she* understands. Properly speaking, it's what she means.

ELLEN. I'd like to know what a trapesing bonfire understands better than me!

ADAM. Well, there is something, if you look for it.

ELLEN. If you mean I don't dress fine, and gad about like a dolled up baggage . . .

ADAM. I mean—Freedom. That's something you never had no dealings with in your life.

She is genuinely surprised;

ELLEN. But I am free! We're all of us free in this

THE IDOL-BREAKER

country. Only I don't go about complaining! Thank God, there's nothing of the grumble-gizzard in me! I'm what you might call a contented woman.

ADAM. Ay, there's where your complaint comes in.

ELLEN. Complaint, indeed! What's wrong with me?

ADAM. Little Boswell.

And he grins at his little joke.

ELLEN (*flaring*). Yes, I can see who's been converting you! Oh, it's like you! You a respectable married man with a nice wife and home of your own, go off gallivanting with trollops as learn you to poke drunken fun at Little Boswell and the Bible! Then you come groaning about conversion!

His joy wilts like a flower.

ADAM (*mad*). Groaning! Well, I'm damned!

ELLEN. Don't you swear at me: if you *are!* . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Foreigners coming here in their flaming gewgaws and flauntings, setting people agen Little Boswell! I don't care if she does hear me! I'm patriotic! I don't think we ought to be made feel badly about the place of our birth!

ADAM. Birth! What sort of birth, do you think, belongs to a bastard?

ELLEN. Adam, *will* you stop using them bad words! That's why people don't like you. Besides, they'd forget all about it, if you didn't keep on reminding them so often.

ADAM. I don't want them to forget. I want them to remember the sort of man Little Boswell lives on.

ELLEN. Little Boswell's all right, if other folk didn't come pushing their noses in. Meddling! . . .

I never could abide ear-rings, anyway. They don't seem quite respectable to me.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Ellen, did you ever take a good look at Little Boswell? Did you look at it just now, as you come up?

ELLEN. I had enough to do, worriting my inside out, without gaping at landscapes. Contentment!—That's the trouble with you, Adam: you got none. *I* never found nothing wrong in Little Boswell; and Heaven knows, I'm particular!

ADAM. Beelzebub! There'd have to be some alterations, to content me!

ELLEN (*exasperated*). Such as what now?

Which gives him his opportunity;

ADAM. Well, I'd build it different, to begin with. All them flyblown pigsties, you call your houses— Human beings hadn't ought to live in them holes: not without kicking up a shindy! I'd have something more solid: something to last: take a pride in. What do you say now to Walls of Marble and seven big Gates of Gold? . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

*He breaks through her inarticulate
gasping.*

Ay, there'd be no mistaking that, would
there? That would be something *like* a city!

ELLEN. Every blessed drop of it's gone clean up
into his head!

ADAM. And what's a city doing, dumped down in
the bottom of a valley, like a rubbage heap?
Too low! No fresh air to it! I'd have it
stuck up somewhere to be seen. High!
Top of the hill yonder: that's the place for
a city: so as the sun might rise upon the
whiteness of them walls, and the glittering
of them golden gates.

ELLEN. Adam, are you talking about the New
Jerusalem?

ADAM. I'm talking about the city yonder, waiting
for the builders.

*They are gazing upwards, through the
imaginary window.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. If you're asking for something pretty to look at, there's a flag. What more do you want?

ADAM. Ay, any slave can set a flag flapping. It takes a king to build a city.

ELLEN. Yes, I suppose yon flag don't suit you now.

ADAM. Well, I was thinking maybe a little soap and water . . .

ELLEN. There you go! Then you wonder why you get yourself disliked!

ADAM. Oh, I know the poison brewing for me yonder! What did Little Boswell ever know about flags, but waving them? It's men like me as honours flags. Men as 'll have them clean.

ELLEN. Well, if you'd only learn to tell them nicely.

ADAM. There's plenty to tell them nicely. My God, there's room in the world for one like me.

ELLEN. But you get so excited. Why won't you

THE IDOL-BREAKER

be like other people? You don't see them getting excited.

ADAM. Them! A fat lot of excitement you could squeeze out of a load of dead mummies. The things they rot by have been dust hundreds of year. They don't know what day they're in: what hour.

Do you know what's wanting in Little Boswell?

ELLEN. Something funny, I'll be bound! What?

NAOMI *flashes round as he replies.*

ADAM. A clock!—Yes, C-L-O-C-K, clock! Something to wake these corpses from their graves. Something to resurrect them. Something loud and terrible, to tell them the time of day.

Hark! . . .

The Sunday School clock drones the three-quarters, dismally.

Do you hear it? Yon old passing bell down

THE IDOL-BREAKER

at the Sunday School, telling a quarter to five. You believe that, don't you? Well, it's a liar: it's nine minutes to.

What's wanted in this place, I tell you, is a clock. Built up high in the tower of the City Hall, that's where it should be: up yonder: among the blazing stars. No more of yon sort, telling lies! A clock with a living heart inside it, beating time: a clock with a living tongue to it, clamouring tune: something as 'll dare to tell the truth.

ELLEN. Adam, have you been drinking again this morning?

ADAM. Yes: I am filled with new wine! Like them other drunkards on the Day of Pentecost.

ELLEN. Adam, it's blasphemy!

ADAM. Ay, it was then. It always will be, when you speak the truth.

ELLEN. God forgive him!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

*Emerging from the shadows, NAOMI
now stands between them.*

NAOMI. Well, have you found him?

ELLEN. It's you! What have you been doing with him? He's not the same man.

NAOMI. Maybe he's bewitched, or star-struck, or sold himself to some spirit.

ELLEN. What are you blathering about, you heathen hussy? There isn't such things nowa-days.

NAOMI. Well, names change, same as men.

ELLEN. I don't want to talk with you. What business have you meddling with other people's husbands, anyway? That's what I want to know.

NAOMI. Why, I've had people's husbands journeying with me, out in this wilderness, afore to-day.

Symbolism is not ELLEN's strong point.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. Well, what with her wilderness and his marble palaces, blessed if I know whether I'm on my heels or my head! Tell me, are you immoral or only daft? Don't you know this is a forge? Just an ordinary, messy, blacksmith's forge?

NAOMI. Ay, with crags for anvils, and great thunder-bolts for hammers. Look! There's lightning playing about him now.

ELLEN. Take your evil eye off my man! He's nothing to do with you. Let him be, I tell you! He's mine: not yours!

NAOMI. Yours, house-fly! Watch if he's yours! . . .

And she rivets her gaze upon him.

ELLEN. Adam, answer her. Don't let her stand magging there. Tell her the truth. Tell her as you belong to me.

NAOMI. It's too late. He passed that milestone hours ago. Little Boswell don't hold him no more. He belongs to someone else.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. It's a lie! Who?

NAOMI. Someone you never dreamed of. Himself.

ADAM. Myself! . . .

NAOMI's *eyes have never left him.*
Nor do they now.

NAOMI. I known men belong that way, one sort or the other, down and down the years.

ELLEN. *That's unscriptural, at any rate! Ye are not your own; but bought with a price.*

She serves this up with vinegar.

NAOMI. Oh, there's price paid, sure enough. When men belong to themselves.

ELLEN. Yes, no-one to watch over them. I know!

NAOMI. They get watched over.

Adam wakes as from a trance;
[59]

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. What did they do? Them men—down and down the years . . .

NAOMI. It was the way they took me. Sometimes they found me the barren mother of dead Idols; and they perished, breaking them. Sometimes they begat upon me—Living Children!

ELLEN. All this is so much double Dutch to me.

ADAM. It's as simple as the Book of Revelations.

ELLEN. Well, I like people to talk plain out what they mean.

ADAM. If she was to talk plain out what she means, somebody'd be getting locked up.

ELLEN. Good job, too! Her and her idols! Why, we got none nowadays. Only Roman Catholics. Thank heaven, I'm Protestant, and was brought up respectable to know God.

NAOMI. Then you'd best keep your eyes open. He's coming. Don't mistake Him.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. Thank you, I don't want you teaching me about God! What should I be likely to mistake Him for?

NAOMI. Abomination maybe; or ruin. Maybe the devil.

ELLEN. Don't you stand jeering at me, Jezebel Rag-bags! I'm a religious woman, I'd have you understand: I know all about God. His still small voice come to me when I was only half your age. And I wasn't no chicken, neither!

NAOMI. His voice don't always come so still and small. Sometimes it come in cracking thunder and the clattering of hailstones. He's not all silence, God! He's slow: He takes a long time getting His breath; but He can shout. I know God's voice make windows rattle, and set the comfortable houses of men trembling from base to beam. When He's angry! When things gone too far! He don't leave off easy, when He speaks that way. Not till He done.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Ay, and strange mouths He uses, God!
Don't always pick respectable! Any old
jawbone 'll do for Him, so long it wags
proper. Riffraff: play-folk: men in mur-
derers' cages! I seen Him twist the mouths
of gutter-dogs and harlots to His use: I
seen men run stark mad, with Him buzzing
upon their lips. Not all music, neither!
Sometimes the roaring of wild beasts made
drunk with slaughter: pouring through the
fat cities: ravening! When God's angry!
When He's out shouting! In the streets!
In Little Boswell!

ELLEN. Adam, don't listen to her. Don't you see?
She's mad!

ADAM. Well, I'm drunk. So we're a pair.
Come, don't stand shivering that way.
What are you afraid of? Don't you see
the beauty of her?

ELLEN. Beauty! She's the abomination out of the
Bible!

ADAM. Why, what's wrong with her?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. It's her eyes. I don't like the way she's looking at you. Nobody ever looks like that in Little Boswell. I don't like the way she dresses herself. I don't like the colour. Why, it's—it's . . .

ADAM. Well, you're not a bull, are you, to mind a bit of colour?

ELLEN. None of us in Little Boswell ever fancied that colour. It's one of the things we—we don't do.

NAOMI. You can't escape it. It's glowing all over the world. Isn't it time you begun learning what it rightly means?

ELLEN. It means the enticement of the devil. It means the destruction of houses. *The deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.*

NAOMI. It means the Living Blood, as makes all mankind one.

ELLEN. Adam, stir yourself! Why don't you send her away?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Where to? You can't send anything like that away. Not when it's once in the world.

ELLEN. There's plenty of other places. What's Little Boswell done, to be upset like this?

ADAM. Send her away! You might as well try and shift the burning sun.

ELLEN. We've got a policeman. What's a policeman for?

NAOMI. He's been tried, time and again. Hangmen, too. But they don't get the right grip somehow. Not on my sort. Even the grave don't seem able to hold me.

ELLEN. There must be some way, if I could only . . .

NAOMI. You can't think of anything new. It's no use: I'm here. You'd better face me.

ELLEN. Why are you here at all? That's what I've been wondering, all along?

NAOMI. Because it's the hour.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. What hour?

NAOMI. Yours. Little Boswell's. The hour when you got to choose.

ELLEN. Choose what?

NAOMI. Idols or Living Children.

ELLEN *looks at her curiously.*

ELLEN. What do you know about children?

NAOMI. What do you?

ELLEN. Never you mind about me. Do you call yourself a single woman?

NAOMI. I walk alone.

ELLEN. Well, I'm a married woman; and let me tell you, children don't always drop down from heaven by choosing.

NAOMI. Ay, that's something beyond Little Boswell. Idols, maybe! Bibles and flags and houses.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Even little limbs and mouths as learn to move and babble like yourselves. But nothing alive! Nothing as 'll save you in the hour your idols crumble. That takes more than Little Boswell. That's bastard's labour. On'y anguish and a mighty long-ing can kindle living children.

ELLEN (*fiercely*). Well, *I* long!

NAOMI (*more fiercely*). What have you borne him?

ELLEN. Bearing isn't the only proof of love!

NAOMI. It's the on'y proof love knows.

ELLEN. Yes, I see your hinting. Because I'm child-less! You, the single woman as walks alone, luring into the dark by-ways! Oh, I know you, wrecker of men's homes! Anyway, you won't lure here! Not with my man, Doll-of-the-ditch! I'm his lawful married wife, I'd have you know: if I *am* only barren!

NAOMI. By God's deep dawn and all the glimmerings of it, but *I'm* not barren to him!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. What do you mean, you slut?

NAOMI. The dayspring! I have heard the living heart-beat of his child.

ELLEN. Adam, don't stand answerless there, like a stuck sign-post. Be a man! Call her a liar!

ADAM. There isn't no answer. I'm trying to piece it all out in my mind.

ELLEN. Piece what out?

ADAM. About her and me.

ELLEN. Good gracious, you don't think I believe . . . How long have you known the woman?

ADAM. That's the point. If you'd asked me that question half an hour ago, I'd have said about ten minutes.

ELLEN. There, I know: she *is* a liar.

NAOMI. And if she was to ask you now?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Why, now . . .

I seem to have known you, one time and another, since the beginning of the world.

ELLEN. Oh, what's the use, with a couple of loonies! I'm done!

And she plumps down on the anvil.

ADAM *addresses* NAOMI *as in a dream*;

ADAM. Back in the womb of my mother, it begun. In yon hill. Properly speaking, yon hill *was* my mother. She bore me: she grew big with me: I come up out of the black guts of the earth, like a lump of metal. Deep down, burrowing in the dark, a slave: that's the way I was then: under the Romans. And up above me, in the sweet air, something watching for me, waiting; and I never knew you. But I climbed out into the light— You drew me. And the Romans were gone. And there was lead in my hands.

Next, come them others. They ground me back into my own soil—Mine: they

THE IDOL-BREAKER

stole it from me. I laboured for them; and for wage, they bound fresh bonds upon me: oaths, and fears, and bits of lawyer's paper. In the light of day, on the good green earth, a shackled man, labouring, without no land of his own. And you come once more, unbeknowns to me. You come many times. And I fought and fell, and rose again like Christ; until my blood's huge waves engulfed them. And they were washed away like sand. But there were drills for seeding, and reapers for the harvest. And I made them.

And now, this last bondage—Little Boswell. Little Boswell, barren with idols, waiting to be broken; and yonder, slumbering, that unborn voice of iron. And you come to me again; like you done last night: up on the moor: in the dews and the starlight: softly like a bride. And in the dawn, at last I know you.

*The wine of ELLEN's wrath, fermented,
now bursts the bottle;*

ELLEN. No, I'm not done! Not so long as there's

THE IDOL-BREAKER

a tongue wagging inside my God-given head! . . .

What was that about last night?

ADAM. I spoke plain enough. Good Lord, you'd think it was something as wasn't happening in every household in the land, to see her carrying on!

ELLEN. Not in my household! Not while I'm in it! There'll be nothing of that colour hanging about Number Three, Paradise Terrace: not so long as there's a flat-iron left! I'll learn your sinful soul what Little Boswell means by Home!

ADAM. Ellen, will you . . .

ELLEN. No, I won't! You've been talking your head off all the morning: now I'll talk mine. Oh, I may be blind and dull: I may be only a poor doting door-mat for trampling brutes of husbands to wipe their dirty boots on; but thank God, I am respectable!

ADAM. I'm jiggered! You'd think to hear her . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. Think! You never stop to think! It's not what *you* think! It's other people. What d'you suppose all them out there are going to think of you?

She flings a large infuriated gesture through the imaginary window.

ADAM. Them! I'll twist them inside out with thinking, before I've done with them. Whether they understand, or no.

ELLEN. Yes, shout it through the window, do! Let all the world know the kind of husband you are! It's bad companions, that's what it is. Liquoring roisters talking politics and disrespect for happy homes, down at the pot-house. Them, and the wicked books you're always addling over! And yon razzle-dazzle—with her rings!

But I'll not stand it! Don't you think I'm a fool, because I'm your wife. Wives have a lot to say for themselves, let me tell you. They have more at the back of them than you reckon. There's all Little Boswell at the back of me. Little Boswell

THE IDOL-BREAKER

won't see me put upon like this— No, not for twenty gipsy women!

ADAM crosses over to her angrily;

ADAM. Look here, Ellen, can't you understand a simple little thing like . . .

ELLEN. Don't you come nigh me! Drunken! Unclean! You and your brazen trollops!

ADAM (*roughly*). Oh, all right: you're like the rest of them. It's no use trying to explain any little thing straightforward, in this hole!

And he goes and sulks in the doorway.

ELLEN concentrates on NAOMI.

ELLEN. And as for you, gipsy, I know your meaning now! Nice lot of mystery you were making, weren't you? Well, I see through your mystery. I've heard of you before: read about you—Book of Revelations, seventeen-five, it was. Your sort of mystery come out of wicked Babylon! There's a word for it: a name for your sort: a name

THE IDOL-BREAKER

too bad for a decent woman's lips! But it's in the Bible, right enough! . . .

Oh, you can look at me with your eyes! I'm not afraid of you no longer, now I know you! So take care! I've got friends at the back of me, as 'll make short work of you—Scarlet Woman!

NAOMI. Take care, you! There's something at the back of me, also!

And ELLEN stands silent at last, as under a spell.

Adam growls ironically from the doorway;

ADAM. Well, they're coming! *Your* friends, Ellen. I can see them down the road.

ELLEN (*mechanically*). My friends! Who? . . .

ADAM. Some of the black eyes and bloody noses from last night's jubilee.

ELLEN wakes up with a jerk;

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. What do you know about last night's jubilee?

ADAM. I was there. You'll be hearing by and bye.

ELLEN. You went drunk into the Sunday School!

ADAM. No, I was only mad then: I got drunk afterwards. Wasn't good liquor, neither.

Howsomever, I got up steam enough to let off a bit of my mind.

ELLEN. Adam, you wouldn't dare!

ADAM. Why, what's the matter with my mind?

ELLEN. What wickedness was it brought *you* to Sunday School?

ADAM. Why, to save souls, of course. I thought the Constituted Sons of Freedom would like to hear the word of God. So I told them.

ELLEN. He's taken the bread smack out of our mouths!

ADAM. Then we'll chew grass like their other cattle.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. So that's why their lights were on all night!
I thought it couldn't 'a' been all jubilee.

An illumination comes to her;

Adam, they've been praying for you!

ADAM. Telling God about me, eh? Well, they'd
have to get back at me someway.

ELLEN. Don't blaspheme, man!

ADAM. I can't help it, woman. I'm a true believer.

A babble of voices is heard approaching, outside.

ELLEN (*fearfully*). Who are they?

ADAM. Three of the Sons. I'll name them for
you. Like a wax-work show.

And he does so, as they enter, one by one.

Nathaniel Dank, lawyer. Little Bos-
well's notion of constituted freedom.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Sammy Snark, editor of the *Little Boswell Free Press*. Penny a line freedom.

Jeremiah Jones with a black eye. Iron-monger: boss of the Sunday School; and first trombone of the MacDabble Musical Club—all knocked into one. Makes free with other people's brains.

*Each wheels round as he is named,
facing ADAM, who is left of the big
doorway.*

DANK is a little dapper man, bald-headed, with a twisted lip. SNARK is florid, with a big watch-chain and a squeaky voice. He stands to the right of DANK. JEREMIAH JONES has a good face, thin, ascetic: one black eye; and a voice like an organ. He passes by the others, and stands left of the group.

JONES. Yes, my man, I've had nothing but your language running in my head all night long!

ADAM. You can heave it out of your head a thou-

THE IDOL-BREAKER

sand nights long, and they won't mistake it for yours, Jeremiah.

SNARK. What did I tell you! You'll get nothing out of him but dissertations and double meanings.

DANK. Leave him to me, Snark— Just one moment, brother Jones—I'll deal with him. Now sir, come over here to your own anvil, and be . . .

Well, upon my word! . . .

He has turned, and sees NAOMI there.

The others turn like automata.

SNARK. Upon mine! . . .

JONES. Mine, too!

He feels safe, with public opinion at the back of him.

He and SNARK speak together;

THE IDOL-BREAKER

BOTH. Who is the gipsy woman?

DANK (*slowly*). Yes, who is this—highly lurid female?

NAOMI. Do you want to know? I'm something you all heard of, many a time. On'y you thought I was long ago!—Shut up in your books and Bibles, or stamped out by policemen, or nailed to rot on stretching arms of wood. You didn't dream I was so nigh. Well, I'm here in your Little Boswell, at last. Up agen your very doors! Since you'm fond of naming things correct, you'd better call me same as *she* did—Scarlet Woman!

The sun rises. It breaks through the open and imaginary windows, flooding her with light. She is like a sign in blood.

DANK. We didn't come here to talk Scripture with you, woman. We came here to talk . . .

But the words wither on his twisted lip.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. All right: I can watch a spell longer. Go on with your talking, Little Boswell!

*She settles herself upon the anvil, the
"wild thing" shining in her eyes.
The sunlight burns upon her for a
moment, and then wanes behind a
cloud.*

The Sunday School clock drones five.

*If required, the CURTAIN may descend
at this point.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The day is clear, though clouded. ADAM is in the doorway. To the left below him, the Constituted Sons stand rooted as before: Editor SNARK, Lawyer DANK, Sunday School JONES. They face the Scarlet Woman at the anvil. ELLEN is by the carpenter's horse.

DANK. Hm! I think I understand.

SNARK. So do I. The situation's worth a column, as it stands at this moment.

JONES. I don't agree with you. I consider she's a public outrage, and her language disgusting.

SNARK. That's good enough for my purpose. I'm yellow, and I don't mind who knows it. Yellow and unashamed! . . .

Keeping me up all night, listening to a lot of jaw!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JONES. We've been sitting up too! I'm ready to drop.

SNARK. I wish you'd dropped nine hours ago. Look here! Most of it your cackle and *his*!

He whips out his note-book savagely.

JONES. Notwithstanding, I consider that woman no fit subject for discussion before the young. If you don't know your Bible, I do.

SNARK. I'll make it an interview with her, if I like. I know when I'm on a snap, without *you*! . . .
Whereabouts in the Bible was that?

DANK. Tut, tut, gentlemen: this is no time for idle prattling.

SNARK. Oh, shut it! We've had nothing else but prattling from you since midnight. Withered old ninepin!

DANK. How dare you defame me, sir? I am no ninepin!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. And then they talk about the anarchy of the lower classes!

They all three remember him at once;

TRIO. Ah! . . .

DANK. Which brings us to the point of our visit.

ELLEN moves up swiftly to ADAM;

ELLEN. Now be careful. I'm not friends with you; but I don't want you a bigger fool than you are.

SNARK (*writing*). See! His own wife knows him!

ELLEN. It wasn't meant for your ears, Mr. Smarty!

ADAM. I'll be careful! I won't let a word slip from me as I don't mean.

*He goes down to the carpenter's horse,
straddles it, and lights his pipe.*

Now, Sons of Freedom! Spit it out.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK. Prisoner—I mean blacksmith: don't be noisy!

ADAM. Can't help it, your honour: it's my trade.

*DANK frowns forensically upon him,
and opens the case for Little Boswell.*

DANK. Now, we had better confine ourselves strictly to the point at issue. The trouble with proceedings of this informal kind is that the lay mind lacks directness. Now the point is . . . But be seated, gentlemen. Samuel Snark— No, there: on the nail-keg. Jeremiah Jones . . .

*JEREMIAH looks round vaguely: then
makes a line for the wheelbarrow.*

Better wheel it up here. There's nothing like being together; and your black eye is evidence. I'll take the — er — mustard-box.

But ADAM is troubled about the perambulations of JEREMIAH;

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Here, mind them bricks, now. Whoa! . . .

Which pulls him up with a bump.

You're a good lifter, ironmonger; but you'll never do for a cart-horse.

JONES. I will not stand tamely here, taking your . . .

And he tumbles back into the bricks.

ADAM. That's all right, trombone: take it sitting. You're welcome to all the wheelbarrows I ever made. It's when you pinch my patents, I object.

JONES. I protest on my word of honour as an ironmonger . . .

ADAM. No: not with me, Jeremiah! Or would you like me to hand over the proofs to Sammy?

DANK. All of this is beside the point. The point is . . .

SNARK. Devil take this keg. It's bristling with bayonets!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK (*testily*). You're as well off as we are!
Look at me! Colour of your rag!

He scrabbles the sides of the mustard-box, and shews his paws.

The point I wish to press home . . .

SNARK. Well, I'm damned if I'll sit on it. They are a yard long.

He goes and squats on the handle of JEREMIAH'S barrow. It promptly turns over.

JONES. Of all the lumbering elephants I ever . . .

SNARK. How the blazes was I to know the bricks wouldn't balance us? Do you think I go about carrying the avoirdupois of bricks in my head all day long? Silly devil!

JONES. Don't you say devil to me! Language like that!

SNARK. I'm not one of your Sunday School brats!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

I'm a newspaper man: words mean nothing to me. Ass! Don't know *how* to sit on a wheelbarrow! There! . . .

He has built himself a little throne of bricks.

And now I suppose my trousers will be scarlet!

He glares at NAOMI as though she were the cause.

DANK (*icily*). The point I had on the tip of my tongue, before this trifling digression . . .

SNARK. Well, I'm syndicated! Who started the digression? It was *you* made us all sit down.

DANK (*with exasperated distinctness*). The point I had on the tip of my . . .

SNARK's *snorting interruption*, checked by JONES, admits a *melodious note* from ADAM;

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. He'll never get that point off his tongue: not if he uses tweezers.

SNARK. I will not be gagged. I—will—talk! He's been badgering us with his points all the blessed night. Do you think I'm going to lose my beauty sleep for nothing? Just because he's a lawyer, and can mess about as he pleases, with a row of knock-kneed little witnesses, he fancies he's the whole show. He's not! *I* am. I stand for the freedom of the press.

DANK (*frigidly*). And I sir, stand for freedom too! Freedom of the kind they recognize in—courts of justice.

JEREMIAH *by this time has subdued
his spirit to a patient smile.*

JONES. I am afraid we are all getting a little excited. Brethren, let us smile. I stand for the freedom that makes us kind to one another.

SNARK. Except in the ironmongery, where you are a well-known sweater!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

He is rewarded with a nasty saved look.

ADAM. Would you like to hear anything about my kind?

Their unanimity claps like thunder;

TRIO. No sir!

ADAM. I thought I'd make them brothers again.

ELLEN. Hold your tongue! Can't you see they're mad as May-bugs?

SNARK. Don't you call me May-bug! I'm not so sure that you ought to be here at all.

ELLEN. It's our forge. Fine thing, when you can't speak a few words in your own forge!

SNARK. We've had enough words from your family already. If you think you are going to add your mite . . .

ADAM. Here, don't you get meddling with my wife!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

SNARK. Who wants to meddle with your wife? But if she imagines for one moment . . .

DANK. In strict law, this forge, being in point of fact their own . . .

SNARK. I don't care a curse about that! I'd push my nose into the bedroom of the angel Gabriel for twopence!

ELLEN. Well, I'm not going to be stopped saying my bit: not for all the newspapers in the world! And that's flat, Mr. Falsetto!

** They burst into a quintette, all except
NAOMI babbling together. The heav-
ens nearly fall; but justice prevails;*

DANK. Please, please! Gentlemen, please, please, please! . . .

When quiet is restored, he commences;

Every single word of this is totally beside the . . .

** For quintette, see end of volume.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

SNARK. Hell, I've had enough of you! If it's points you're after— Sit on them! . . .

He plants him firmly on the nail-keg.

DANK. Oh! This is assault and battery!

SNARK. I'll make it murder, if there's one more point from you till I've done. Now, I've warned you!

*The Law expostulates pathetically;
but the Press flaps him down, and
proceeds to spread sweetness and
light;*

I take it, we all understand very clearly what we're here for. There's no need for any humbug about it— The truth, the disgusting truth: that's my motto. Ostinably, we are here to sit in calm dispassionate judgment; but really to disgorge our spleen upon that blackguard parading as a blacksmith. He's kept me one whole night without a wink: I've scribbled myself paralytic because of him:

THE IDOL-BREAKER

my digestion at this moment is one intolerable pang of Sunday School milk-pap and jubilee buns; and I tell you plainly, he'll get nothing but gyp from me!

Are you with me, Jeremiah?

JONES. Ungrudgingly!

SNARK. You, Dank?

DANK. Reluctantly—yes sir!

And he tries to escape from the keg.

SNARK. No, you don't!

And he pops him back again.

Now, we've heard a lot from this fellow, one time and another, of what he is pleased to consider freedom. The subject seems to be in the air: we've been talking about it ourselves: we've heard of nothing else all night long. I don't know how it is with you others; but my mind is so constituted, that if I have to think of one thing for more

THE IDOL-BREAKER

than five consecutive minutes, it makes my stomach turn. It's the way I'm built: I don't mind confessing it: I'm liverish. Well now, I'm going to put an end to this little show, see! I'll let this rhetorical blacksmith know just what Little Boswell means by freedom. I'll make him look at freedom for once in his life with Little Boswell's eyes, if it costs me ten columns!

He stops to mop his exuding brow.

ADAM. Now, he's the bloke as tells you I'm long-winded!

SNARK. Curse your filthy soul!

ADAM. And my language that bad I hadn't ought to live!

SNARK. Don't you think you're going to stop me, by chipping in with funny lines. I'm going to finish my little lecture about freedom, if I burst. I'll teach you to belittle that precious heritage for which the sires of Little

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Boswell bled! Yes sir, freedom! Freedom herself, whose noblest boast it is, that, panoplied in Jove's immortal thunders, she never hurt a fly! . . .

DANK *forgets his anguish in a burst of patriotism.* JEREMIAH *seconds him sepulchrally.*

DANK. Hip, hip, hooray!

JONES. Hear, hear!

This emboldens SNARK to further song;

SNARK. The charter of our peculiar joys, the guardian of our faith, she has made us what we are! Freedom! None of your red flag blasphemy and sedition! But freedom as she is understood among her Constituted Sons of Little Boswell, above whose consecrated heads, there proudly floats and flaps and flutters . . .

However, I reserve that for the last paragraph.

JONES. Oh, go on, Samuel! I always like that bit best.

SNARK. Later, Jeremiah. I won't fail you! . . .

What do these agitators want, I ask you? Do they realize they are driving trade smack out of the country? They talk about freedom! What about freedom of contract? What about free libraries? Free trade? Protection, even!—Thank God, I'm no partisan: I can accommodate myself to any change of public sentiment; and generally do! So long as there's backbone to it—financially. But all this socialism and syndicalism and trades-union tommyrot! What about the inexorable law of supply and demand? What about bimetallism, post-impressionism, the differential calculus? And another thing: If you divided out everything equally to-day, by to-morrow morning . . . Well, perhaps you've heard that argument before.

I tell you, the real trouble with the workman is laziness. He boozes, he beats his wife, he gads about in automobiles stirring strife and class hatred; but he won't work.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Won't what? Where the devil d'you think all these things come from? Dropped out of the skies?

JONES. Yes, and who finds you work? Me! Don't I take from you almost everything you make?

ADAM. You do, Jeremiah! You play the happy smiler with it, before you give it to the public; but you certainly do.

DANK. Of course, Jones, as a mere consumer, I . . .

JONES. You have nothing whatever to do with it, Dank. Political economy as it's known in business takes no account of the consumer. *He* makes what *I* find profitable; and *you* get what you can.

DANK. There's a fallacy there somewhere, I'm sure.

JONES. Probably! But I'm in the trade!

ADAM. But I thought Sammy yonder said something about supply and demand.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JONES. That argument is only used to squelch the preposterous claims of the proletarian.

ADAM. Them long words mean me, don't they? Well now, supposing I was to stop the supplies?

JONES. It would be outrageous! You'd stagnate trade!

ADAM. Ungrudgingly! Would it be unconstitutional, lawyer?

DANK. Strictly, no; but very inconsiderate! The consumer would certainly object.

ADAM. What does the consumer do for me?

JONES. He and I together keep you in bread and butter; and I regret to add—abominable beer!

ADAM. Quite right there, Jerry. The liquor I swiped last night was thick enough to choke a giraffe.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK. There's one thing positive. If you attempted any such thing as you have hinted, all Little Boswell would unite to oppose you. Yes sir, and with armed force, if necessary.

ADAM. Whose armed force?

DANK. Why ours, the constitution's, of course!

ADAM. I thought you said it wasn't unconstitutional.

DANK. Don't you sit sophisticating about the constitution with me, sir! I'm here for that purpose. It's your business to blow your dirty bellows, and obey!

ADAM. In other words, there's a ruling class as runs the constitution any damned way it likes; and a slaving class as keeps them filled with vittles for doing so. And then you have the blasted sauce to call yourselves a democracy! Why, I feed all you sleek fat loafers! Here am I sweating out my gizzard to stuff a lot of nannygoats with tripe and onions and all the luxuries of the land.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK (*angry*). Let me tell you sir, the consumer will not for one moment brook . . .

JONES (*shouting him down*). I maintain it is the employer, the captain of industry, who . . .

ADAM (*bellowing*). What about me, the bloke as does the job?

They are all three fisting the air.

SNARK. Is all this going to degenerate into a sociological discussion, or is anything going to be done? I want to see things moving. Action: that's my watchword.

ADAM. What do you want me to do? Hit you with a sledge hammer?

SNARK. I want you to sit still for ten minutes if you can, you jumping buffalo, while I perorate about the flag! . . .

Listen, Jeremiah. You'll find this useful for one of your Pleasant Sunday Entertainments for the Young.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JONES. By all means. You couldn't have chosen a more appropriate moment.

*He composes himself beatifically; and
SNARK is about to blossom, when
DANK worms in;*

DANK. The thing I'm worrying about is: What's the woman doing in the place, all this time?

SNARK. Dank, do you realize you are damming the flow of a serious apostrophe to freedom?

DANK. Well, but she's done nothing since her last cryptic remark but sit there watching us. I don't want to carp; but surely, that's not good form. If she's here for some purpose, let her out with it. If not, hadn't she better go away?

SNARK. What do you say? Do you want to?

NAOMI. Yes.

But she remains motionless.

SNARK. Well, are you going?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. No.

SNARK. What do you propose doing then? Stick on that anvil forever?

NAOMI. Maybe.

And picking up the fallen sledge hammer, she sits watching still.

JONES. Snark, never mind that female on the anvil. Tell us about freedom and the flag.

SNARK. How the blue-pencil can I gather my wits to tell you anything with Dank about? I never can open my head for a few patriotic observations without some ass braying! Silly old messer! Philandering with women, when there's work to be done!

DANK. I never philandered with her!

SNARK. It 'll take me till six o'clock to-morrow morning, as it is—writing up last night's tosh: without wasting time now! Oh, bag your head!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK. Not until you apologize for defaming my character, sir!

SNARK. I'll see you burning first! And what's more, here go twelve thousand nine hundred and forty-two words—not counting coughs and stammers—of the most putrid rot ever spluttered from a public platform! There! That's how much of *you* last night goes down the giddy pathway of immortality!

And he tears reams from his note-book.

DANK. Good! No more announcements in your yellow rag!

SNARK. My Lord, we can live without lawyers, so long as there's a theatre in the world!

DANK. You are a squeaking puff-ball, sir!

SNARK. Oh, tut, tut! Gas-bag!

DANK. Tut, tut, to you, sir! Scribbler!

And he snaps his fingers at him boldly.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JONES (*mildly*). In view of the somewhat heated atmosphere, perhaps the moment is opportune for a little prayer.

DANK and SNARK *jump on him at once;*

BOTH. No, you don't!

SNARK. We know your prayers!

JONES (*violently*). Oh, all right! Pair of blatant fire-proof atheists, bound for the bottomless abyss!

SNARK. Fire-proof, blatant, am I? Well then, here goes Jeremiah! And I'll see the Constituted Sons with crowns of glory before I publish a battered semicolon!

The note-book lies demolished on the ground. They glower at one another. ADAM makes himself pleasant meanwhile;

ADAM. What I want to know is: How much an

THE IDOL-BREAKER

hour am I going to get for the use of my forge?

This provides an outlet for them;

TRIO. Silence, sir!

ADAM. Why, I haven't said more than half a dozen words since you come into the place. And then they call me a talker!

JONES. We heard enough of you last night! Enough to last us a lifetime.

He fondles his black eye.

ADAM. I . . .

DANK. It's no use, your bursting out like that. We will not listen to you.

ADAM. If . . .

SNARK. There he goes again! He'll keep us chattering here a twelvemonth, if he can only get an audience.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. . You . . .

TRIO. We—will—not—listen to you!

ADAM. You know, you'll be getting me really mad soon. It's about time I begun playing the bull again!

SNARK. Don't listen to him, lawyer. Stop your ears, Jeremiah. *You* know what he is when once he gets up into the pulpit.

ADAM. Listen, you constituted fatheads!

They begin dancing dithyrambs before him;

SNARK. We will not! Socialist! Flouter of flags!

JONES. Atheist! Blasphemer! Person obviously insincere!

DANK. Your taste is execrable! You go about spreading unpalatable ideas!

SNARK. I shouldn't wonder if your uncle stole
[104]

THE IDOL-BREAKER

potatoes; and I suspect you yourself of hideous immorality.

JONES. I don't like the cut of his hair! I don't like his voice! His voice nearly drove the MacDabble Musical Club to irrevocable schism!

SNARK. Hypocrite! He talks of God!

JONES. Egotist! He says, I!

SNARK. Undesirable citizen!

JONES. He drinks beer! Swears! Pokes fun!

TRIO. Anarchist! Grrrr! . . .

ELLEN'S *blood can't stand this any-
how;*

ELLEN. And who are you, I'd like to know, as can stand barefaced there, like a row of cocoanut shies, calling my man names?

JONES. Sister, I'm shocked! *You!* . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ELLEN. Don't you sister me, Mr. Kindface Bottom-Note-of-a-Bassoon! Nice thing, Little Boswell's coming to, when a row of three-a-penny old Aunt Sallies can get up on their hind legs and call my man names!

DANK. Surely you'll never take *his* part against *us*?

ELLEN. I've heard of it being done. There's a many women do take husbands' parts, poor fools! I'm respectably joined together in holy matrimony, I am; and I don't care who knows it! Even if he do talk through his hat.

SNARK *pounces on a piece of notebook;*

SNARK (*scribbling*). You admit that, do you?

ELLEN. I don't admit nothing to you, Samuel Snark! I'm not afraid of your old newspapers, don't you believe it! *Beware of the scribes: the same shall receive greater damnation.* That's what the Bible says about you.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

SNARK. This pretentious religiosity won't wash with me!

ELLEN. Won't it? Well then, this not being Sunday, and no need for lying, put this in your tub of soap-suds!—I never did like you, Mr. Billy-clever-goat: no, not that much! . . .

She measures him the tip of her thumb;

I think that part in the *Little Boswell Free Press* called "Our Woman's Column," silly! I believe it's written by a man.

SNARK grabs up a bit more note-book;

SNARK. I'll immortalize you for that! (*Does so.*)

ELLEN. You! Why, they'll only know of you because I called you billygoat.

DANK. My good woman, all these recriminations . . .

ELLEN. Don't you call me a good woman! I'm no woman of yours, good or bad: if you do

THE IDOL-BREAKER

make duck's eyes at me, down chapel yonder, when I got my bonnet on. Bald-headed old gentleman like you, as ought to know better!

DANK. I never in all my life made the slightest improper . . .

ELLEN. Oh yes, you did! Me and my next-door neighbour watch for it. You and your sly ways! Oh, you're talked about, I can tell you! You're known all over the village for a lickerish old rip.

DANK. This is libel! This calls for fire from God! It is indictable under the law.

ADAM. Ellen, you're a wonder! I couldn't 'a' done it better myself!

She turns on him, as on the others;

ELLEN. I know what sort of a wonder I am, without no honeying from you. Oh, but I'm a fool, a born blind fool, taking you all so serious! Wasting good breath as might be

THE IDOL-BREAKER

cooking breakfast, on a cradleful of squabbling grown up babies!

ADAM. Ellen! D'you mean to say you don't discern in this the first deep mutterings of the revolution?

ELLEN. First my grandmother! Why, I'm your wife, man! Little boy's big talk don't take me in!

ADAM (*angry*). Look here, Ellen! . . .

ELLEN (*angrier*). Don't you Ellen me! I've had enough to put up with from you for one day! I'm not friends with you. *You know what for!*

ADAM. But . . .

ELLEN. Now, you'll only make me say things I hadn't ought to. You know what I am when I lose my head! . . . No, I won't! I'm going home to get the breakfast. It'll be ready soon as you men done talking. And it's tripe and onions!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

She sniffs impartially at all combatants, and is about to turn away, when she bethinks her of a word for
NAOMI;

As for you, you hussy, I've been watching you while these gowks were gassing; and I don't think so bad of you, as I did. I liked the way you give them beltinker, when they first come in. That bit was fine. And the sun rising and all! . . . Lord, if I could talk like you, I'd give them what for! . . . All the same, don't take yon looby of mine too serious. I've seen them caught by big eyes and ear-rings before now. Well, it don't last! . . . You'd best come down and get a bite before you go.

Them and their revolutions! It's about time as women took hold in Little Boswell! Look at 'em! Revolutions! Any baby boy's tin trumpet's loud enough to blow down yon Jericho! Lot of men!

She flounces out of the forge. A moment later, NAOMI follows to the doorway, watching her down the road.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

*There is silence in Little Boswell for
half a second. Then the vials pour
forth;*

JONES. There go the first-fruits of your foul teaching!

DANK. Yes, what can you think of a man, whose own wife makes public parade of his infamy?

SNARK (*livid with cacoëthes*). Oh, don't you fear! His wife's not going to escape unscathed from this! Nor his friends! Nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his!

ADAM. Won't they, you scab, you muckworm, you ink-blot! Why then, I'll cast myself and them and her and everything I have into this burning fiery furnace! If we char to ashes!

TRIO. We—will—not . . .

ADAM. Listen, do you hear me! Last night, it was
[111]

THE IDOL-BREAKER

only punched heads and bleeding noses.
If I begin this time . . .

*And he snatches up the sledge hammer.
They scuttle behind the wheelbarrow,
each arming himself with a brick.*

TRIO. Don't you come near us!

DANK. This is nothing more nor less than intimidation!

SNARK (*top-noting it*). It is sabotage or something!

JONES (*abysmally*). It is the reign of terror!

NAOMI turns round, her eyes gleaming.

DANK. Let me tell you sir, there's a law for blacksmiths that go swinging hammers in people's faces!

SNARK. He's no blacksmith! He's a street orator in disguise. But I'll unmask him!

JONES. He's not even a harmonious blacksmith.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Ask any member of the MacDabble Club down there.

SNARK. I don't see anything so wonderful in his work. Tubal-Cain, now! There *was* a blacksmith for you! But he's dead.

JONES. Blacksmith, indeed! I'm in the ironmongery. I think I ought to know a blacksmith!

ADAM (*with blasting scorn*). Ironmongery!

SNARK. Gag him, somebody! He's beginning again.

JONES. What do you think of a blacksmith hammering spires from drain-pipes?

TRIO. Grrr! . . .

JONES. What do you think of a blacksmith beating ploughs from sword-blades, and rattling them in our ears like dreadnoughts?

ADAM. Don't you blaspheme my children, ironmonger!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JONES. *You, a blacksmith! You don't know your own trade! You'll never get a pat on the back for ironwork! You can't make things!*

TRIO. He can't! He can't! The blacksmith that can't make things! He can't make things!

ADAM brings the sledge hammer thundering down upon the anvil, NAOMI at the same time crying aloud for wild joy. Little Boswell nearly jumps out of its skin.

ADAM. Leave your clatter! . . .

Now, *I'm* speaking, do you hear? And when I say *I'm* speaking, you know who I mean. If you don't by now, it's time you did.

You're a liar, ironmonger! So are you all! I can make things! . . . What man is there here, as 'll dare to stand up now, alone—so as to be seen, so as to be heard, so as to be known for a swine all the rest of his days—and say out loud, again, as I can't make things? . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

The Sunday School clock drones the quarter. He waits for every echo to die away.

That sound out yonder reminds me you are liars.

And he waits again for silence.

I hear another, as tells me I can make things.

SNARK waits this time; but wriggles.

SNARK. This rhetorical claptrap won't go down with me. It's too much in my own line. I know the trick of it.

JONES. What was he hinting at? I heard nothing.

SNARK. Oh, just one of his double meanings. That's what he does—symbolizes to conceal the atrocity of his real intention.

JONES. Did you hear anything, Dank?

DANK. Not so much as a tick.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. That's because you none of you know what's going on behind you.

They all whirl round like dervishes.

JONES. I see nothing. Do you, Dank?

DANK *(wiping his pince-nez)*. Not a speck.

ADAM. Why, what's yonder, staring you in the eyes?

DANK. What?

JONES. Where?

ADAM. There!

SNARK. Come, out with it! Don't keep playing the kipper with us like this.

ADAM. Well, of all the blinking bats I ever . . .

*And crossing to the inner workshop,
he bangs at the door with his fist.*

What the thunder do you call this?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

TRIO. A door.

ADAM (*wagging the chain*). And this?

TRIO. A chain.

ADAM. This?

TRIO. Padlock.

ADAM. I should think so! What's the use of Sunday School, if they don't learn you your catechism better? . . .

Now come and stick your ears agen it.

DANK. Stick ears! What for?

ADAM. What do you usually stick ears for? To listen, you chump. Now, don't keep me waiting all day.

SNARK. If you think I'm going to make a limpet of myself up against your door of doom, you're jolly well mistaken.

ADAM. Wise again, Sammy! What's going on in

THE IDOL-BREAKER

there is enough to make you kiss your pen
and perish!

DANK. My word! What can that be?

ADAM. Something as lives by law.

DANK. Law! Perhaps then, professionally, I'm the
fittest person to . . .

He goes and glues his ear to the door.

ADAM (*mysteriously*). Well? . . .

DANK. Some kind of mechanism, that's all. Buz-
zing and going plunk, plunk, plunk! . . .
Rather—irregular, isn't it?

ADAM. No, that's you. Listen again.
Don't that tell you anything?

DANK. Not a word to me.

JONES. Mechanism? Here, let me come.

SNARK'S *molluscan simile is admirable.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

A most unusual noise. What the Mac-Dabble Club might report upon as—piffing. I don't like it.

ADAM. Oh, you will, Jeremiah, when it pays. They will, when the label's on.

He beckons SNARK invitingly;

Now Sammy!

SNARK. Not me. I'm not going to play the goat in your little seances.

And he squats down on a brick. Which topples.

JONES. Well, tell us what it is.

ADAM. Something as come from God through me.

They retire hastily from the door.

Ay, terrifying, isn't it? Not ironmongery, Jeremiah: nothing for you to monkey with. Your law don't touch it, Nathaniel Dank:

THE IDOL-BREAKER

it's one of its own, set up in the stars. ' As for you, Sammy Snark, if you were once to understand this child of mine, now coming to birth . . .

SNARK. Well, I'm not here to understand, see! I'm here to criticize.

ADAM. You'll never manage it, Sammy. I've done you in the eye this time. Oh, it isn't no joke. I've made you something terrible.

SNARK. Yes, most of your things are.

ADAM. Right again, Sammy! When once yon living spirit leaves this forge, it will inherit the earth! Oh, I know! God don't whisper in my ears for nothing. Inheritance! That's what it's singing to itself in yonder. Look out for your idols in that day, Little Boswell!

DANK. Yes, I've heard that sort of language before. I know the dogs that use it, too. If you mean, you have in there some infernal contrivance, some machine to . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. I'm no murdering soldier to blow God's images to dust!

DANK. Some of you are! What does your red flag mean—your contemptible red flag?

ADAM. What Christ means! Freedom! Brotherhood!

SNARK. Yes, we know that brotherhood! Strikes, class-hatred, bomb-shells! Give me Little Boswell, say I!

ADAM. Yes, *we* know that brotherhood! The trusts, bank panics, high prices, starvation, sweat shops, white slaveries, ignorance, millionaires, despair! Give me the brotherhood of your broken dogs and harlots rather!

DANK. After all, the law makes no distinctions. We are all brothers under the law.

JONES. We certainly are under the Gospel.

ADAM. Then why the devil don't Law and Gospel

THE IDOL-BREAKER

get up and shew it? Instead of talking about it.

SNARK. Well, *you* talk!

ADAM. I only talk about the things I've done. Live things! You don't call your dead mumblings life, do you? So many dried-up gibbering yesterdays, that's all as comes up out of your wheezy lungs! My child in yonder is the voice that speaks—To-day!

TRIO. Well, tell us what it is!

ADAM. I will! . . .

No, I won't. I'll shew you.

They trot behind the wheelbarrow, barricading themselves; as ADAM, with much ominous rattling of chains and padlock, undoes and opens the door.

There issue forth two very obvious musical sounds, alternating regularly.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM *whispers esoterically*;

Do you hear now?

JONES. It's different, now the door's open. Why, it's almost—musical.

DANK. It won't go off, will it?

ADAM. No, it goes on—forever.

SNARK. Well, music's nothing to me: can't tell one note from another. That's why I hate having to write about it.

DANK. Yes, there *is* a sort of regularity about it, danged if there isn't!

JONES. And it certainly is tuneful. It might just catch the public . . .
I'd like to look into it.

SNARK. You know, if you fellows are going over in a bunch like that, you'll be making me compromise!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. That's the trouble with the truth. It pulls so many liars over half-way.

SNARK. Don't you fret! I'll have to see before I believe. What's the use compromising, if the wind veers again before you've raked in? You have to look out for things like that when you're moulding public opinion.

ADAM. Perhaps you'd like to peep first. It's good for you to be ahead of the times.

SNARK. Well, seeing's believing. Mind you, if I find . . .

Half-way to the door, he stops;

You're certain everything's—all right?

ADAM. *Yon* is; but I expect you'll jump a bit.

SNARK. My Lord, we're used to jumps, with you! Well, here goes! . . .

He recommences his journey gingerly.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Stop: I've a plan. I'll prove you beforehand. All of you whip out your watches.

TRIO. Watches! What for?

ADAM. What d'you suppose? Catch butterflies? . . .
Come, come now! . . .

And they obey like marionettes.

That's better! . . .

Now stick your eyes agen them. Ready?

TRIO. Ready.

ADAM. Now, I'll shew you something. The moment I holler *Rats*, you'll all be pointing to twenty-five minutes past five. Are you all ready?

TRIO. Yes.

DANK. Just one moment! . . .

He puts his watch to his ear: winds

THE IDOL-BREAKER

it: rattles it; and stands at attention with the others.

SNARK. Ass!

ADAM. Now! Five twenty-five, remember! . . .

He peers into the darkness of the workshop, holding silence with his hand. There is a long pause, filled only by a crescendo of the measured music within.

Rats!

SNARK. By George, he's right!

JONES. Who'd have thought it?

DANK. Incredible!

ADAM (*eagerly*). Wasn't I right? Five twenty-five, eh?

JONES. By everyone of us.

ADAM. You're sure of that?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

TRIO. Sure.

ADAM. Take your oath?

TRIO. Solemn affidavit!

ADAM (*rapturously*). Well, you're all burning liars!
It was five thirty-one.

They seem unable to share his joy.

TRIO. Impossible!

SNARK. Why, I put mine right, down the road, just now.

DANK. So did I.

JONES. Me, too.

ADAM (*delightedly*). But you're wrong. Six whole minutes! Three hundred and sixty golden seconds gone to pot!

DANK. We can't all be wrong together! Why, we all say the same thing!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. It's no use, I'll die! Damn it, can't you see how funny you are?

SNARK. Listen, you cachinnating jackass! Can't you grasp the first principles of communal solidarity? It *was* five twenty-five. Little Boswell time.

ADAM. Well, of course, if you take Little Boswell for the hub of the great cart-wheel! . . .

JONES. Well, isn't it? Why, empires are made in our pattern!

ADAM. Lord, listen to them! Look down on them! Don't they take the biscuit?

He is of course addressing his God.

SNARK. What do you think Little Boswell's for, but to keep time for the rest of the world? Let me tell you, what Little Boswell thinks to-day, they'll all think to-morrow—or be pulverized! It's what we mean! It's our destiny! It's what our gunboats mean!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK. It's the meaning of our law, our religion, our institutions! Above all, it's the meaning of that sacred symbol, our flag!

SNARK. Superior to all other flags!

JONES. Our flag! Heaven's pet flag!

TRIO. The flag of Little Boswell!

They all three take off their hats.

ADAM clambers up into the skies with glee;

ADAM. Ha-ha-ha! Five thirty-one by everlasting God, the stars, and all the powers of heaven, and Little Boswell calls it twenty-five!

JONES. Sacrilegious dog! What right have you to fix God's time?

ADAM. The right of a Fellow Workman! Look in yonder! That's what right!

*They scamper to the inner workshop,
like a drove of vermin.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

TRIO. What is it?

JONES. Why, it's only . . .

TRIO. A clock!

ADAM. God's clock! The clock I made!

SNARK. Do you mean to tell me, we've been wasting all this time over nothing but a damned clock?

ADAM. Ay, with bells to it! There's nothing silent about my clock. It's like me! All hell can't stifle it!

Now do you get my meaning? Now do you understand this forge and me, and yon glad child of thunder?

SNARK. By all the devils clamouring for copy, yes, I do!

ADAM. Well then, now I've clapped your puppet heads together, get out of my road, Little Boswell! Big Boswell is waiting for its iron!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

DANK. You'll have to pay for this, before long. I tell you, the law . . .

JONES. You'll have to pay hereafter. I tell you, the Gospel . . .

ADAM. Ay, handcuffs and hell! Little Boswell's bogies!

SNARK. Do you know what you are? Simply—funny! *I* don't think you clever! You're only a joke, a loud-lunged, mealy-mouthed, improper, mangy, shaggy-headed joke! I can't say more. But I will! You wait till tomorrow morning! I'll smash you for this, my man! Red's your colour, is it? Well, I'll shew you what yellow signifies! My God, I'll smash you to a pulp!

ADAM. Smash and be damned to you! *My* God, and all the morrows of everlasting are at the back of me!

SNARK. I'll write it up at once. I'll go now. No need to hear the end of this, to write it up!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

He grovels on the ground, snouting up scraps of note-book; and rushes out, squealing, scribbling, blasphemous with unclean devils: upon his brow, the brand of all the stinking beasts of Gadara forever.

DANK. As for me, I'll go and look for the policeman.

He does so. JEREMIAH, about to follow, turns for a word. ADAM forestalls him;

ADAM. No need to tell what you'll do, Jerry! You'll get out cheap imitations of what's in yonder, and sell 'em for God's Time-pieces.

JONES. That's an idea.

He modulates in the beautiful diapason of an ironmonger. And passes.

ADAM *shuts the workshop door. He leans against it, breathing heavily.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Well, I've done it. There goes my bread and butter! Beer, too! I've lost them, everyone! The Constituted Sons, the Sunday School, and the whole half dozen Mac-Dabblers and all!

He goes to the wheelbarrow, and sits down disconsolately.

God, how alone I am! Well, it's worth it!

NAOMI. Alone?

She comes and stands by his side.

ADAM. I had forgotten you. Where have you been?

NAOMI. Behind you. Watching for the idol-dust to settle.

ADAM. What comes next?

NAOMI. More idols. And then—the building!

ADAM. What am I, one man alone?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. One man.

ADAM. And you? . . .

*There is a shadow in the big doorway.
It is JAKE.*

JAKE. One moment. I have a word to say here.

*ADAM turns. NAOMI's eyes grow big
with apprehension.*

ADAM. Who are you? What's your business here?

JAKE. Ask my mate.

*He points at NAOMI. The day dark-
ens.*

*The Sunday School clock drones the
half-hour.*

*If required, the CURTAIN may de-
scend at this point.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The day is overcast with clouds of blood and bronze. JAKE is still in the big doorway. NAOMI stands to the right of the anvil: ADAM, left of the wheelbarrow.

NAOMI. I thought you were—dead.

JAKE. So did I. Maybe I am. That's what I come to see.

ADAM. I don't follow you. Come to see what?

JAKE. If I'm dead.

ADAM. How do you hope to find out a thing like that, here?

JAKE. By my fangs. Do you know what they call me? Bloodhound. And I am. And I come to kennel in this smithy.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. This is no smithy of the dead. It's where they forge living things.

JAKE. Ay, so you said last time—when I found you huddled in the church. You said it, time afore that; and afore, many times. Then I come; and there was nothing but dead bones rattling.

ADAM. How did you get here?

JAKE. Same road as her; but in the dark. By scent.

NAOMI. I thought it was past all finding out, yon twisted way!

JAKE. I found it. I been following you ever since the hour I died. You remember that hour? . . .

NAOMI. I can see you now—your white face grinning up at the moon like a dog's.

JAKE. You was swift, I don't deny it. I allus found you easy quarry afore. This time,

you was like the wind. You cost me sum-mat, this time, following you. Somehow, the dead don't slip along so lithe as the living.

Cunning as a vixen, you was—the ways you took. You knowed I favoured the swampy valleys, and the tall fat weeds of the winding rivers: you took the bleak moors and the open places, up where the wind blowed wide and lost among the clouds. But the breath of you come down to me in the mud-flats, and my dead nostrils quivered. And I followed.

When you come to the towns, you knowed I loved the lurking alleys, and the dark backways of houses: you took the market-places, and went out open, flaunting among the folk. But the flame of you left a trail behind, like a star shooting. And my dead eyes kindled. And I followed.

Once I nearly touched you. Remember that day, and the half-blind shepherd whose hut you helped him build, and him thankless, piping on a wood whistle? Remember that rattle of stones behind you in the gully? It was me, falling. I was close

upon you. Then the piping begun. And I was on'y a corpse.

Last of all, I come by your warm nest up in yon bracken, early this morning. I knowed the scent of your body, I seen the shape—the coil of it, like a wild doe's in the sweet fern there. I snuffed out *his* litter. Hard by yours, it was—a ditch and hedge between. Then I begun shifting my eyes, and I seen him! Tramping down the moorside. I watched; and there was summat stealing after him—soft—like a shadow, like a vapour, like a flicker of dew-fire in the dawn. It was you. And you followed him through this door.

Then I knowed what you was about; and I dragged my rotting carcass after you. I been buried among them holly-hock yonder all the morning. I know everything you said and done. Your words come bumbling down to me among the worms.

Now you know how I come. By my nose mostly. Out of the black night. Out of the mouldering sod. If I'm not alive,

THE IDOL-BREAKER

then I'm the wraith of a bloodhound! And
I'm in this smithy.

*And he enters and stands between
them.*

ADAM. You're here by no leave of mine.

JAKE. Dead men go where they will, without no
leave.

ADAM. Why do you keep on calling yourself dead?

JAKE. She knows.

NAOMI. He was dead. I seen his eyeballs glaze. I
heard him rattle.

JAKE. You left too soon. There's allus some life
fluttering when you leave too soon.

NAOMI. It was to the heart. I seen it quiver there.

JAKE. I got no heart.

NAOMI. Then the poison-bag inside you.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. There was a bone, here: betwixt that bag
—and you.

ADAM. What's that you're hinting? Do you mean . . .

JAKE. Bloody murder: that's what I mean. What
do you say to that now? . . .

On'y—I come back again. That's my
way too. We don't die so easy, her and me.

And he eyes NAOMI narrowly.

NAOMI (*fiercely*). What right, you coming back
again? What right, corpses cumbering
the earth, when once they'm laid?

JAKE. Wolf's right! The right of brute upon his
mate!

NAOMI. I am no mate of yours.

JAKE. Then right of gender-wolf, whose whelps
you borne!

NAOMI. I bore no living thing to you. What liv-
ing thing was ever borne of hate?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. Then blood-wolf's right upon a brood of bastards!

NAOMI. Ay, call them bastards! They were none of yours. I bore them alone, I—I myself, among the mountains.

JAKE. I lured them down to me in the dank valleys.

NAOMI. They were the sons of heaven. I cradled them in the skies.

JAKE. They died unsuckled on the earth.

NAOMI. They were the falling of new stars upon the world.

JAKE. I doubted them.

NAOMI. My firstborn! He was like the twilight! There was the promise of peace in his eyes. He went among the wild things, taming them.

JAKE. He met a wildness bigger than he knewed. It tore him in the forest.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. His brother come like noonday—a child of joy. He leapt among the hills. He sang.

JAKE. An adder lurking in the river reeds mistook him for a wood thrush, and he sang no more.

NAOMI. My third—that child of sorrow . . .
I can see him now, his arms outstretched,
a little broken sacrifice . . .
He was God's daybreak! His love touch-
ed everybody. He filled the world with
it! . . .

JAKE. I dragged him down alongside me, a thing of shattered dreams, and trampled him!

NAOMI (*passionately*). Where have you lain him?

JAKE (*savagely*). In the ditchside, rotting!

NAOMI *darts to the other side of*
ADAM;

NAOMI. Strangle him!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. And that I will! . . .

*He rushes at JAKE; but the latter
snatches up the sledge hammer;*

JAKE. Hold off you, blacksmith! You'm not the first God's bastard I done dealings with. There's more your breed than Little Boswell breed in me. Do you want to know what I am? Hell's bastard! Not the sort as makes things. The sort as breaks. I stand for freedom too!

NAOMI. Ay, bloodhound freedom! The freedom as breathes the air of death.

JAKE. That 'll be his breathing too, afore I done with him.

NAOMI. Not while he bears in his heart his living child.

JAKE. His heart? I crept in there myself a while ago.

*ADAM puts his hand to his breast, in-
voluntarily.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Ay, don't you know as dead men walk
through hearts as open doors?

ADAM. Ha! The doors of my heart are closed and
locked agen the likes of you.

JAKE. I'm the ice-blast: I go whistling through
cracks and keyholes. Look inside you, now.

ADAM (*gasping*). Well—I'm looking! . . .

JAKE. There where the blood festers, and the scar-
let mists are rising. Oh, it ain't all liv-
ing children inside of you. There's more
than clocks and ploughshares kindling in
your heart!—Ay, more than golden gates
and marble builded cities! There's me!
There's hate! Now do you know me?

ADAM *gives a great cry of anguish.*

So! I'm not dead!

ADAM. Get out! Get out of this forge!

JAKE. Not till I done my deed in it!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

*And he lets the hammer fall heavily
upon the anvil.*

ADAM. Oh, I am lost in darkness!

NAOMI. Look up! Yonder! Big Boswell's waiting
on the hilltop!

JAKE. Look down. Little Boswell's waiting, too!

NAOMI. Your child! Unborn! It has never cried!

JAKE. It lacks the mothering of Little Boswell!

ADAM. God! What can I do?

JAKE. Do! You ask what do? And around you
the swinging hammers and the roaring of
great forges ready! Ha-ha-ha! God's
blacksmith, God's bastard blacksmith,
metal in his hand!—And he don't know
what to do, when Little Boswell spits upon
him!

ADAM. I do what I must do. I have only learned
to make things.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. Ay, jangle your chains—slave!

ADAM *leaps upon him; but he is quell-
ed by one clutch of those fleshless
fingers at his throat.*

Nay, not with kings!

ADAM. Kings! . . .

And he reels back, stunned.

JAKE. Kings, I said.

ADAM (*stupefied*). Why, what would kings do?

JAKE. I'll tell you what I'd do. If Little Boswell dealt with me as Little Boswell dealt with you: dead as I am, this arm of mine should rise out of the rot and slumber; and forging burning bolts of iron, I'd smash them all to hell! That's if *I* was a blacksmith! That's if *I* had Little Boswell in the hollow of my hand. I'd shew them what I meant by freedom! Now you know the sort of bastard, I am.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM *stands agonizing for a moment;*

ADAM. But my child! The thing I made for them
with my own hands!

JAKE. Ay, they shewn their cherishing of that!

ADAM. Maybe, their children; or their children's
children . . . Someday . . .

JAKE. Little Boswell breed don't die out!

ADAM. But it's alive! One of God's own images!
Someday they must see. This isn't no
dead idol as I've put together.

JAKE. They'll make it one, if it lasts long enough.

ADAM. Maybe, some blacksmith, some man like
me, centuries to come . . . Someone to get
up and tell them . . .

JAKE. Ay, they'll learn him!

ADAM. It can't be! Not this! This as I've made!
Why, I've carried it inside me, like a mother.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. There's been other mothers known their labour come to naught.

ADAM. There's my love upon it. My own blood pours through it. I've been past death and agonies of hell for yon. It must live!

JAKE. What! For Little Boswell to keep time by?

ADAM. It will tell them the truth!

JAKE. For them to turn to lies!

ADAM. What are you urging me? What do you want me to do?

JAKE. Pay back Little Boswell! Blot them out. Leave them wrecked in blindness!

ADAM. How can I? . . .

JAKE. Yon child of yourn . . .

ADAM. Well? . . .

JAKE. It's struggling! It's nearly born! . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Well? . . .

JAKE. One little hour, and it will be free!

ADAM. Well? . . .

JAKE. Tear it to pieces!

ADAM. Tear my . . .

The Sunday School clock drones the three-quarters. The reminder stirs like poison in the heart of ADAM. He rushes to the imaginary window, lifting clenched fists towards the sound. For a moment, JAKE possesses him utterly.

Adulterous liars! Devil worshippers!
Blasphemers!

NAOMI. Don't listen to him! Stop your ears!
You'm lost, if you listen to him! Lost,
like all the others.

She now stands separating them.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. (*dazed*). Others! What others? . . .

JAKE. *Her* others. You'm not the first. I'm first. But there was others had hankerings after her, afore you come—many of them. You'm on'y the last, as stands betwixt my mate and me.

ADAM. Well, what became of them?

JAKE. They'm gone. Blown to the winds like road dust. Like the scatterings of chaff. They and their bastards with them.

ADAM. What were they to her? Them others?

JAKE. She bore them what they brought to bear.

ADAM. She? . . .

JAKE. Ay, my mate.

ADAM *looks at him searchingly. Then at NAOMI. He is labouring with some growing remembrance in his mind.*

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. That's what it meant then! Down in them Roman lead mines. Ay, and afterwards, up on the good green earth. And yet again, last night, on the moor! . . .

And now I know you, who you are. We've met before, you and me, time and time again, down the years; and each time you worsted me. A shadow, that's what I thought it was, darkening men's minds, dealing out death and bloodshed, turning living deeds to idols. It was you!

JAKE. Ah! . . .

ADAM. Others, were there? Others as knew her before I come! Hell's bloodhound! Black bastard, as I've wrestled with in all my hundred lives! There were no others! There was only one! And it was me!

JAKE. So be it! Wipe away them others! There's still left you and me.

ADAM. That's so! And by Christ's glory, I'm alive!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. So were you afore. Until you meddled with my mate.

ADAM. Your mate, is she? She! This wild thing of the skies and watching stars, your mate! Not while the blood of yonder hill goes burning through my veins! I'll tear her from you, and make her mine!

JAKE. How—yours?

ADAM. Mine for mating! Mine to breed by! Mine for the peopling of a new world—of living children. Now you know the sort of bastard I am!

*They pause, looking at each other
across NAOMI.*

JAKE. So then, once again! . . .
You understand, blacksmith? This is death grip betwixt you and me.

ADAM. I've passed this way before—in blinding darkness. This time, I come with flames.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. The fight's for her, mind you. My mate.

ADAM. For her, that's true! But mine!

NAOMI. One moment. Look into my eyes, you, blacksmith. What do you see written there?

ADAM. I see a kind of wildness. Like a moor bird, nestless.

NAOMI. Why then, yours? What if I'm still my own?

ADAM. I'll make you mine.

NAOMI. You? . . .

ADAM. Ay, for my mate.

NAOMI. You? . . .

ADAM. I'll go along with you, into your wild places. Wandering now here, now there, under the open sky.

NAOMI. Ay, like the wind.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

*Something in her tone makes him
pause;*

ADAM. Why, what do you ask?

NAOMI. I ask a resting-place. Somewhere sure to
abide in.

ADAM. I'll build one for you. Far away! Up on
the bleak moors, you and me alone.

NAOMI. You? . . .

ADAM. Ay, me. I said me.

NAOMI. What *are* you?

He is dumb.

I am a queen. What are you?

He lowers his head.

And I mate with none but kings.

He lifts his head with sudden passion;

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Not with *yon* king!

NAOMI *turns a long look upon* JAKE;

NAOMI (*calmly*). Nay, not with *yon* king.

JAKE. All the same, she's none of yourn—slave!
There'll be no slave's bastards peopling
the world by her! No slave's drab, she!
A queen!

ADAM (*slowly*). Ay, the word goes home! It's
what I am. A slave!

*But his eyes are kindling with some
new big birth of thought.*

JAKE. And I'm a king! If not hers, at least fit
mate for her! Now, where's your boasting,
blacksmith?

ADAM. I'm trying to frame it right. A slave can't
fashion boasts so swift as kings. It's my
dull wit, the mud I'm made of! Ay, the
dirt, the strangling clods out of which I
come! That and the galling chains!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. Ay, clank them! Let them bite well into the fierce flesh!

ADAM. Ay, they bite deep enough!

JAKE. And the ancient rust of them! Like canker, festering!

ADAM. Ah! Slave! Slave, am I? . . .

NAOMI. Look, they'm breaking! The iron pulls like plaited straw! The links are severing, one by one!

JAKE. Ay, but the blood gushing! Slave's blood! No blood of kings to breed by!

ADAM. Ay, no blood of kings! No royal poison creeping through the veins, to turn my heart to stone! But the blood from the lead mines yonder: the blood as toiled and suffered and bore up metal out of the deep hills: the blood as foamed with a thousand dreams and doings, taming the earth and the wildness of it! *My blood!* Blacksmith's blood! The blood of a slave! And as a

THE IDOL-BREAKER

slave, I claim her! Queen or no queen,
she shall breed by what I am!

NAOMI (*exultantly*). Ay, but you don't know what
you are!

JAKE. And never shall, so long as this dead hand
of mine . . .

NAOMI. Ay, but by the golden sun, he shall!

ADAM. A slave, I am! No more freedom! Look,
I cast it from me! Henceforward, I wear
new chains! Not Little Boswell's! My
own! Of my own making!

JAKE. Then all your talk of freedom . . .

ADAM. I am her slave no longer! She is mine, to
deal with as I will.

JAKE. Where shall you deal with her? Far away:
up on the bleak moors, you and her alone?

ADAM. Not so. Down here. In the thick and the
bustle of it. In Little Boswell.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. Ha! Little Boswell will have a word to say to that.

ADAM. They will have no word. It's my word only, now.

JAKE. Ay, and win yourself the Little Boswell hate, as knows no peace.

ADAM. I am past their hate. There's none of them can hurt my heart any longer. *This* is peace.

JAKE. Well, you've paid for it.

ADAM. I have paid.

JAKE. There is yet more payment to come.

ADAM. I am rich. I will meet it.

JAKE. Last night's jubilee won't be in it, with the fun ahead of you.

ADAM. The fun ahead of me belongs to God.

JAKE. It's Little Boswell's part in it I'm thinking of.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. Little Boswell! I have a way to beggar them forever.

JAKE. I'd like to hear it.

ADAM. It's a slave's job, too! Ladders and cranes and great wheelbarrows! Marble blocks and gleaming golden bars! Ay, and mortar! And a deal of iron! And only me as can do it!

JAKE. What?

ADAM. Build their city.

He points up, through the imaginary window.

JAKE. Ay, a barren city! A city of dreams! A city with none to live in it.

ADAM. Then, like God, I'll make them.

JAKE (*savagely*). Then you'll make them bastards, by a wanton!

ADAM. Ay, by one in scarlet.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE *turns to* NAOMI;

JAKE. Do you hear this, you? Have you no answer, when this slave outfaces you?

NAOMI. There is no answer. I'm my own no longer.

JAKE. What, you, the queen as on'y mates with kings!

NAOMI. I have found one.

ADAM (*wonderingly*). Found—who?

NAOMI. The king I watched for.

They are apart, gazing at one another.

JAKE has been standing all this time, rigid, motionless, grasping the handle of the hammer, as when first it fell upon the anvil. He now lets it drop. It clatters from his nerveless fingers to the ground.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. So! . . . It was death.

*They pay no heed to him. Their eyes
are bent upon each other.*

Maybe, some lingering spark . . . Some
mummied bone, unwithering . . .

*NAOMI and ADAM are wandering, high
up on the moor.*

NAOMI. I waited through the long night, watching!

ADAM. I lay in darkness, and I never knew.

NAOMI. I come like a wild thing to the lair of you;
and nestled there.

ADAM. I dreamed of stars, and woke again and
lost you.

NAOMI. I come in the morning before the break of
dawn.

ADAM. And the dawn broke; and it's—Today!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

JAKE. Harkee to this voice, you two. It's from the grave. I am gone from you. But beware! One slip, one halting step hereafter; and I am back again. My sort don't fall and rot away to dust and vapour, evermore! . . .

His voice is like a far-off stirring of wind among dry leaves, down in the valleys. They have never heard him.

ADAM. Today, and the good sweat and toil of it!

NAOMI. And beyond today—Tomorrow!

The sun bursts through the clouds and falls upon them. JAKE watches for a moment, his eyelids faltering; and he slips noiselessly away.

The Sunday School clock drones six.

If required, the CURTAIN may descend at this point.

END OF THE FOURTH ACT

THE FIFTH ACT

*The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged.
The day is golden with sunlight. NAOMI and ADAM
are alone in the forge.*

ADAM. And now for the real jubilee to begin. I needn't wait for tomorrow morning. There's plenty for me to go on with, out there, just now.

*A sound comes back at him, through
the imaginary window.*

There! Do you hear them?

NAOMI. Ay, they're beginning to wake up. Some on 'em have been wriggling since cock-crow.

ADAM. Well, I'm ready for them. I'm ready for the worst as Little Boswell's heart can offer me.

NAOMI. What if it's the best?

ADAM. How best?

NAOMI. Why, what if it's Big Boswell's heart you hear awaking yonder?

ADAM. God! I'm ready for that, too!

NAOMI. Believe it! Don't you hear the sound of it thickening through the air?

ADAM. I—don't—know! I've told these people things before. Many times. Why, it was me, six years ago, as called them here, and told them of the brotherhood of man.

NAOMI. Well, didn't they listen to you, that time?

ADAM. Ay, at first, while I was new to them. Then they turned again to idols; and twisted my plain meaning into tracts for Sunday School. I up and spoke again, and told them of the lies and hate they lived by. Shewed them the death and bitterness of it!—Well, they soon let me know about that. I preached

THE IDOL-BREAKER

their own God's gospel to them, and brought Christ's Murder to their blood-stained doors. They spat upon me. I told them of the lusts as fed their brothels; and every red-eyed wolf among them said I lied. Even when they didn't speak, I knew the meaning of their leering silence. This time, it's freedom—the thing they're always bragging of; and as long as I'm in the world, they'll have it dinned into their heads, as freedom isn't all a matter of flags and soldiers' pop-guns. It's something they've got to sweat for. Don't you think they're going to get off easy, once I see them stuck in front of me!

Oh, I make them laugh, all right. They want to be amused. Lot of jaded johnnies! Everyone of them thinking I mean his next-door neighbour; and I mean just him!

NAOMI. And what about yourself?

He turns upon her with delighted surprise;

ADAM. Now, you're the first person as ever had
[165]

the gumption to tax me that way. Why, you might be my wife! . . .

Oh, but you're right, all right. A man don't carry on the style I do, unless he felt the bite of all these things inside himself. Mind you, I wouldn't have *them* know that! . . .

All the same, I'm different. Mine's the case of the repentant sinner, if I do seem to say: *Thank God, I'm not as other men!* Oh, I'm religious, right enough! Even Snark squeaks that about me. Calls me *Reverend!*

NAOMI. You're talking about yourself a long time, master?

ADAM. Well, haven't I the right to talk about myself? Look what I've done! I'd like to see any of them out there get up and dare to do what I've been doing here to-day. They'd soon learn about it! *You* ought to know better than anybody! Why, woman—and mind you, I'm dead in earnest now—it's been you, watching over me, caring for me, suffering with me, while these putrid

THE IDOL-BREAKER

curs kicked up their mud at me, as made me the mighty thing I am! Oh, you know! And I know too! Do you think I mind the hatred of the whole blind world of them, so long as I have you?

NAOMI. You have me, beyond this whole blind world.

ADAM. What does Little Boswell know of the things as you and me know? They can't begin to dream!

NAOMI. Ay, it isn't easy, holding up high banners in the air!

ADAM. We have wrought together, you and me, deep down in the earth! In the unknown! In the hidden places!

NAOMI. We have torn God's secrets from the clouded heavens!

ADAM. We have builded! We have put together! We have borne living children!

NAOMI. And when the world has flouted us, we have poured upon them untold riches!

THE IDOL-BREAKER

ADAM. They do not know the weeping and the labour!

NAOMI. They do not know the laughter and the sweetness!

ADAM. The sorrows of it!

NAOMI. The glories of it!

ADAM. The downfalls!

NAOMI. The upliftings! The flames of the sky are burning, and they do not see them!

ADAM. The winds of the earth are singing, and they never hear them!

NAOMI. But they shall! The day is coming! It is come!

ADAM. Nay, not for them! Not Little Boswell! Their eyes are bound: their ears are stopped with clay!

NAOMI. Nay, but Big Boswell! They shall wake, and be alive, and understand forever! . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

Hark! I can hear them now!

She rushes to the imaginary window;

Look! They are awake! They are up
and buzzing!

ADAM. Where? . . .

And he joins her at the window.

NAOMI. Out yonder! They are gathered in the
open place below there!

ADAM. Why, it's swarming with them! There
must be hundreds!

NAOMI. Ay, and beyond them, thousands trailing
along the valley!

ADAM. Look! Their eyes are bent this way! It's
about me! See! They're bound for the
forge. Well, I'm ready for them!

He seizes the sledge hammer.

NAOMI. Speak to them, through the window!

ADAM. What shall I tell them?

NAOMI. Tell them what you've always told them.
Tell them the truth.

ADAM. God help me now, I will!

*And the imaginary window is flung as
it were wide open. ADAM addresses
the crowd outside;*

Well, I'm here. In the same old place.
Doing the same old job. Forging iron for
you. You needn't look for tin nor paste
nor putty in this smithy! Iron! That's
my trade. That's why I'm here. And you
won't find me skulking away.

What I'd like to know is: What are *you*
here for? What are you? Are you Little
Boswell come with stones to kill one more
of God's high voices? . . .

Or are you Big Boswell come with guts
of living thunder? . . .

THE IDOL-BREAKER

He considers them a moment, without speaking.

Look at me, you! Big Boswell and Little Boswell together. I'm your blacksmith! I'm the man as works for you. And I'll talk about my work first.

I'm the maker of it: not you. And I'll make, my way: the way God shewed me. It's ancient way enough, if you knew the signs. There's nothing novel in my making: it's as old as the hills—and as lasting. But that's our secret only—the Workers as Know How! Not ironmongers! Not penny-a-lines! Not little pups from Sunday School! All the same, it's yours— To enjoy, if you've not forgotten how! It's no longer mine, the moment I got it done. I make for you! What are you going to give me back again? Dirt and swineyard offal? Or my wages?

He pauses to take breath.

And next, I'll talk about myself. Yes, that's been Little Boswell's pet joke, six

years now: it's getting stale. That and the blasphemy wheeze. Well, here's a bit of both for you. When I say myself—as I sometimes do—I'm speaking of Someone a long sight bigger than me here. I mean God! Yes, I thought that 'd get some on you! . . . If you know your Bibles, if you know the meaning of your own religions, Jew or Christian, you'll understand. If you don't, I might be Pope of Rome and Moses on the Mountain all in one, and you'd never tumble. Don't you see I'm trying to save your damned souls? Shewing the bottom truth of what's inside yourselves! When I say Me most, I mean You more! Though I'm jiggered if some of you deserve it! . . .

He pauses again.

And last of all, I'll tell you of this thing being born to-day. It's a living child, remember. The labours are all over: no more anguish: another moment, and it will be free. But I see a Shadow waiting for it: something dead and mouldering in the

THE IDOL-BREAKER

earth, rotten, green with envy, yellow with decay, pretending to be alive! Something pledged to strangle it! Something as come here for just that purpose! Rat-like, squeaking! Oh, it's poisonous, powerful—I don't deny it! But I alone—one man alone—this day have dared to grapple with it! People of Big Boswell, I made it for love of you! Shall they strangle it?

The People of Big Boswell answer.

Then I am alone no longer! If it were only ten of us, the city has begun.

NAOMI. Hark!

The Sunday School clock drones the quarter.

ADAM. What does yon mean now? It's dead and done for!

NAOMI. It means my work is over. And I must wander on again.

ADAM. What, leave me now?

THE IDOL-BREAKER

NAOMI. I shall be with you always.

ADAM. Where are you going? What are you going to do?

NAOMI. To strike the true hour. All over the world.

ADAM. Oh, Scarlet Woman! . . .

NAOMI. Blacksmith! . . .

It's been a long journey, you and me together, today, mate.

ADAM. Journey? . . .

NAOMI. Ay, a man may move a lot in one short hour, and him never shifting a foot.

And that's what you done to-day.

They are widening apart slowly, their eyes fixed on each other.

ADAM. I have known you all my days, Scarlet Woman; and now you're mine.

NAOMI. You shall know me when the last star is

THE IDOL-BREAKER

shivered into dust. And I shall be yours, blacksmith.

ADAM. Oh, you are fading from me! What are you? Only a dream; or something real?

NAOMI. Nay, I'm real enough, for them as want me!

ADAM. And yet . . .

Why, I've never so much as touched you! You've been here . . . and there . . . and moving about like flame, like music; and yet . . .

I've never even kissed you on the lips.

NAOMI. Haven't you? Why, I've borne you, your child. Watch it, blacksmith.

Good luck, mate.

She fastens her eyes upon him for the last time, and is gone.

ADAM. My child! It has never cried yet! But it shall! It's coming to life! She shall hear it! It shall echo in her heart and comfort

THE IDOL-BREAKER

her forever! They shall all hear it! Ay, even Little Boswell, this time! They shall hear it through the world!

He goes to the inner workshop and flings open the door;

Let your lungs free, people of Big Boswell! Not for me! It's not my child, merely! It is the child of God!

He rushes into the workshop. A moment later, there comes crying out of it a great chord of bells.

The CURTAIN descends.

END OF THE FIFTH ACT

THE QUINTETTE

(See page 89)

The following cacophonies, well rendered, it is hoped may prove pleasing to the futurist ear;

SNARK (*1st soprano*). I'll editorialize you for that remark! Yes, I will! I'll make scare-heads of you! I'll leave you without a shred of honour to your name! Oh, I'll not be silent about it! I'll be an eagle, and scream you in the sun! . . .

ELLEN (*2nd soprano*). Don't you think you're going to top-note me out of my bad opinion of you! Not if I know it! I can scream as loud as you, and will! You, a man! Why, you're only a bad slate-pencil, squeaking like a whistle!

DANK (*tenore buffo*). This will never do! It is
[177]

THE IDOL-BREAKER

contrary to all tradition! It is not done!
Please, please! Gentlemen, please, please,
please! . . .

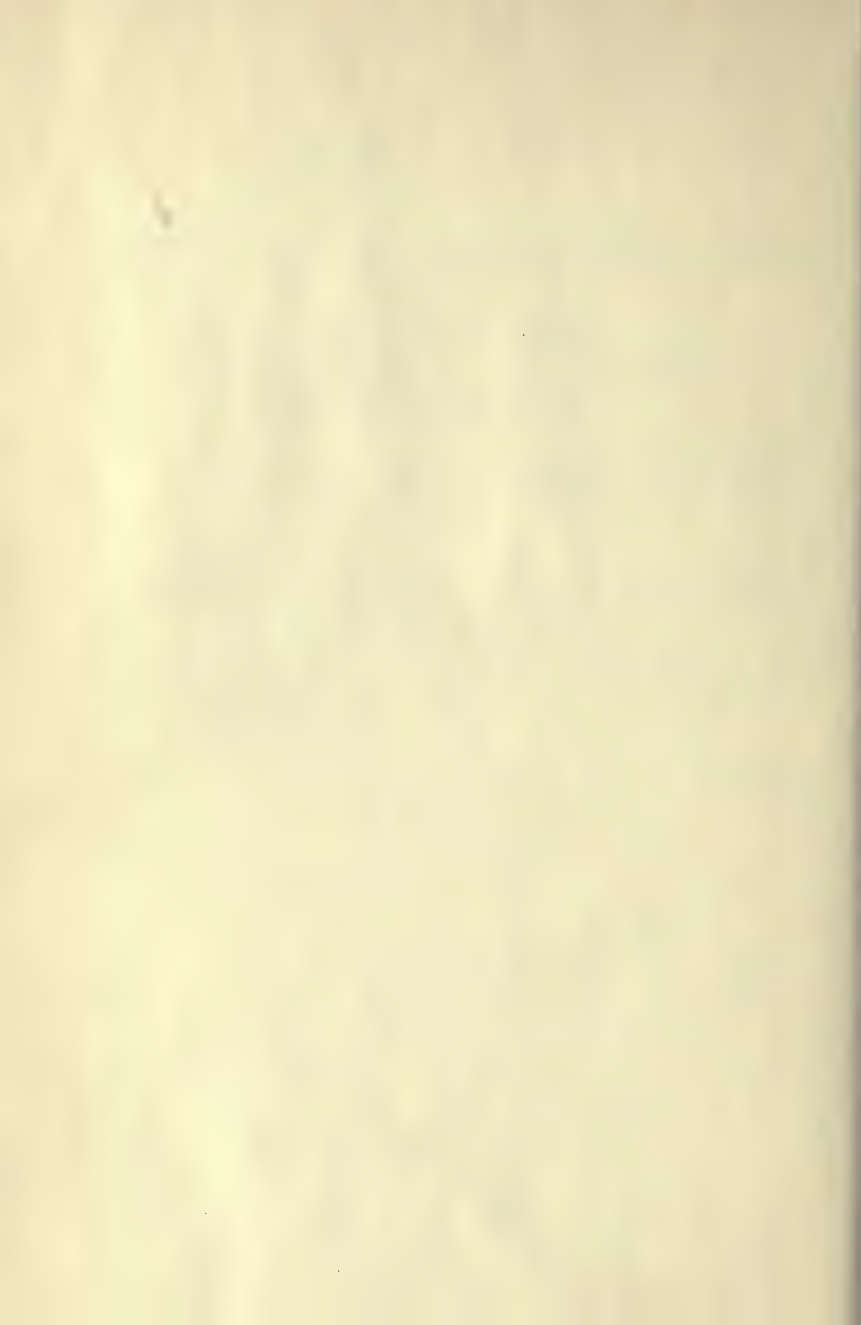
ADAM (*baritone*). Under the spreading chestnut
tree,
The village smithy stands:
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands.

*He sings it, accompanying himself on
an old tin kettle.*

JONES (*basso-profondo*). Is this to be last night's
pandemonium all over again, or is it not
to be? To be or not to be: that is the
question!

*They continue ad lib., until DANK
wins out.*

THE END



PS

Kennedy, Charles Rann

3521

The idol-breaker

E53I4

1914

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY
